

WHAT RELIGION DOES TO MEN

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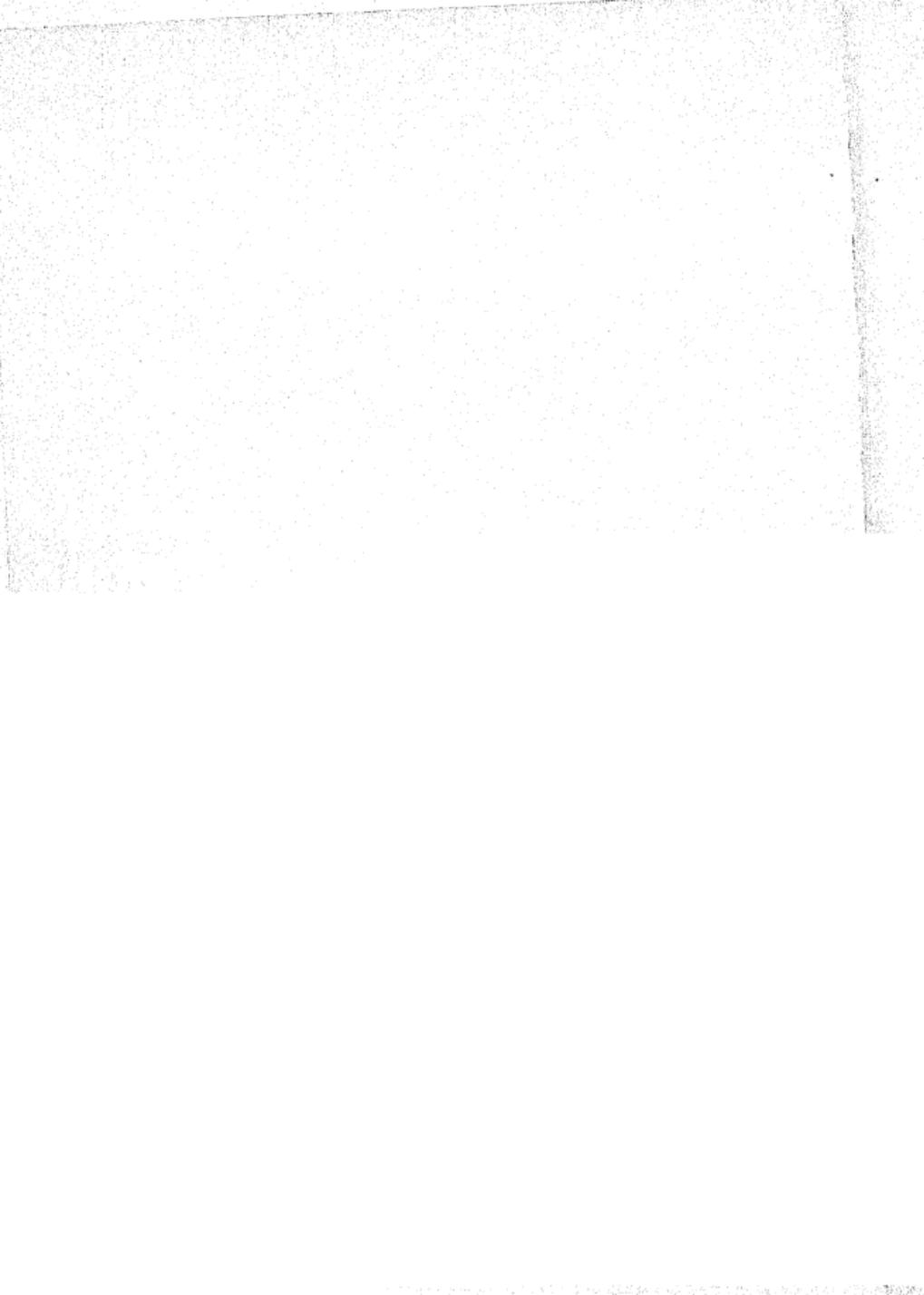
HAROLD ELLIOTT NICELY



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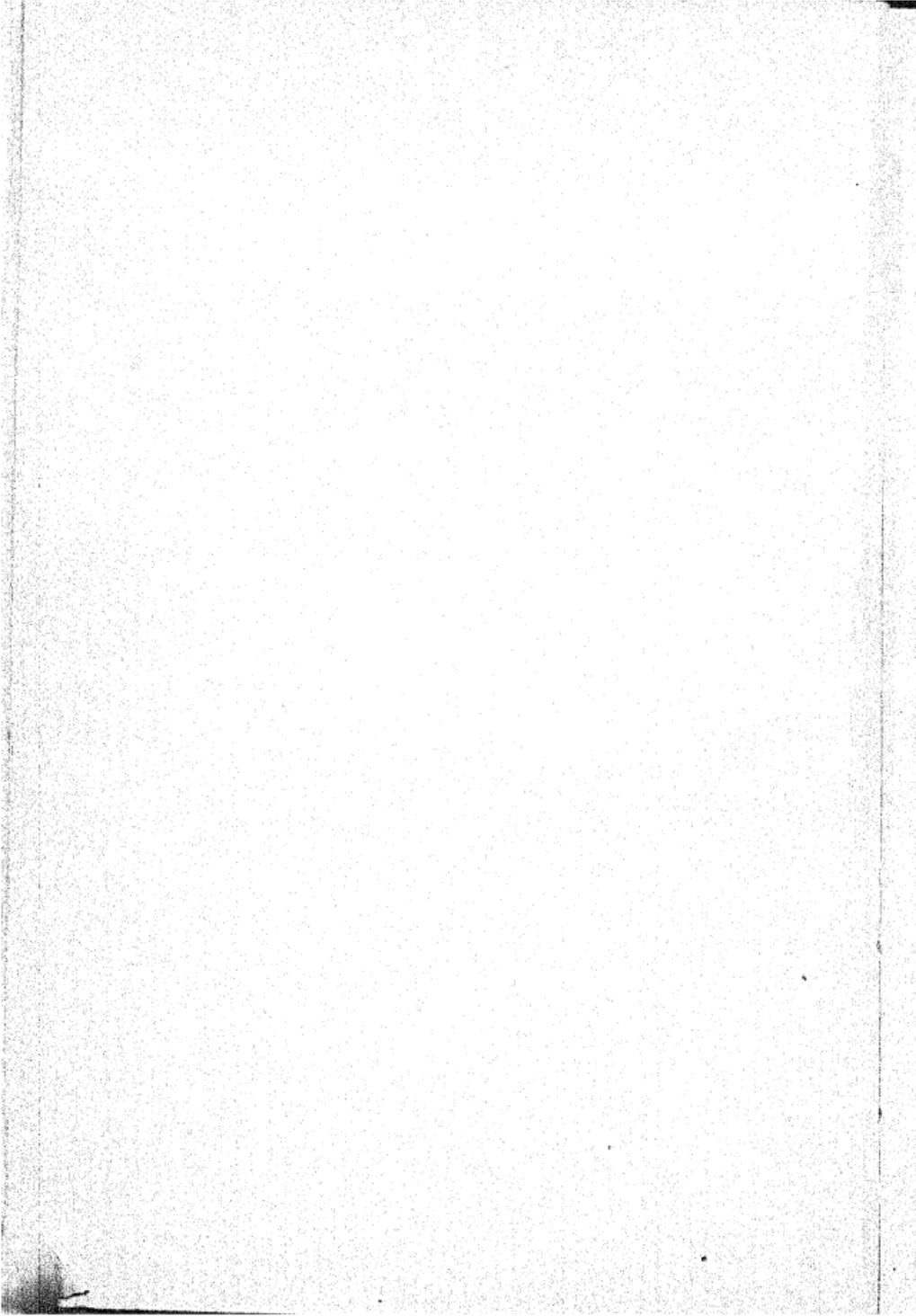
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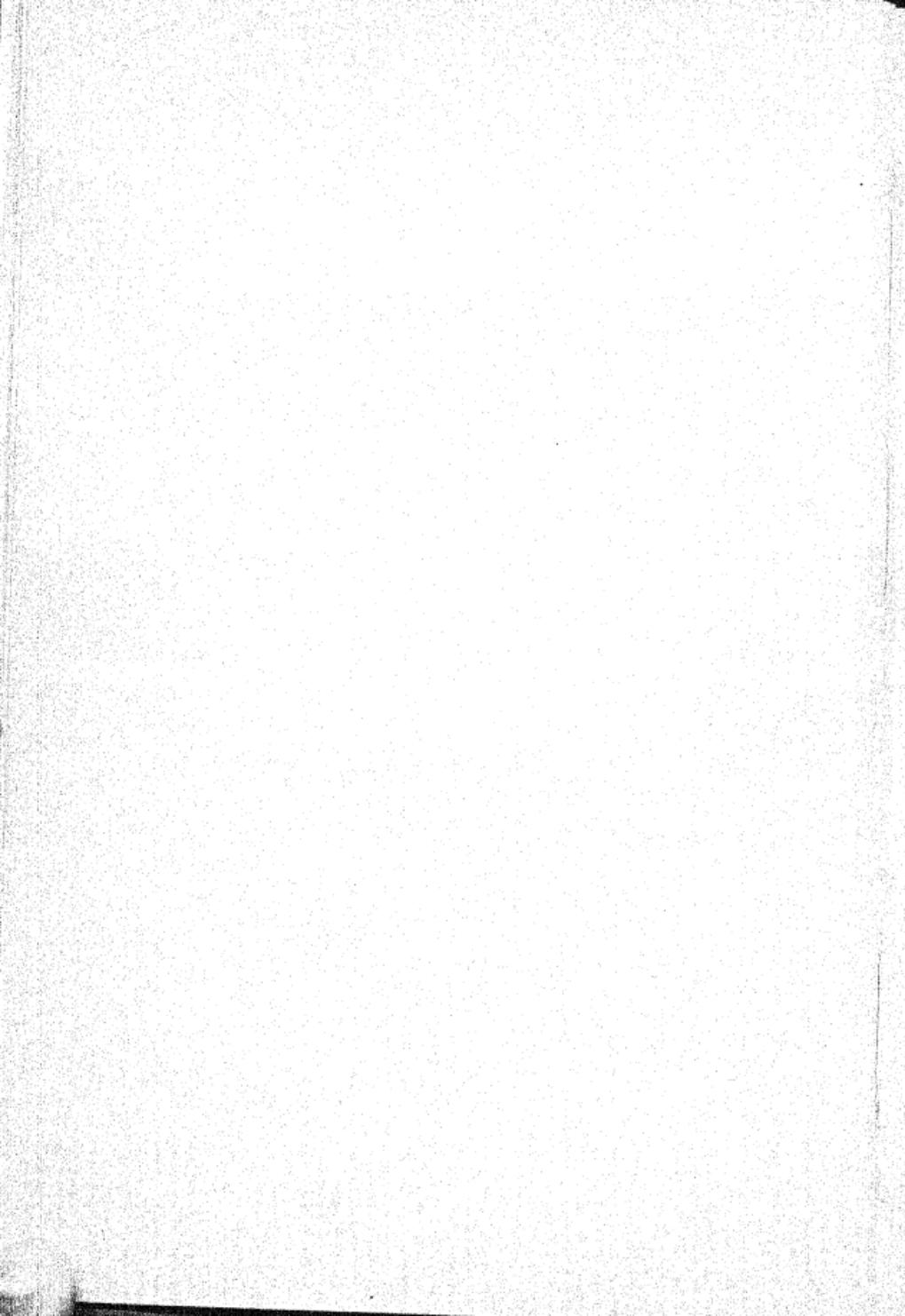
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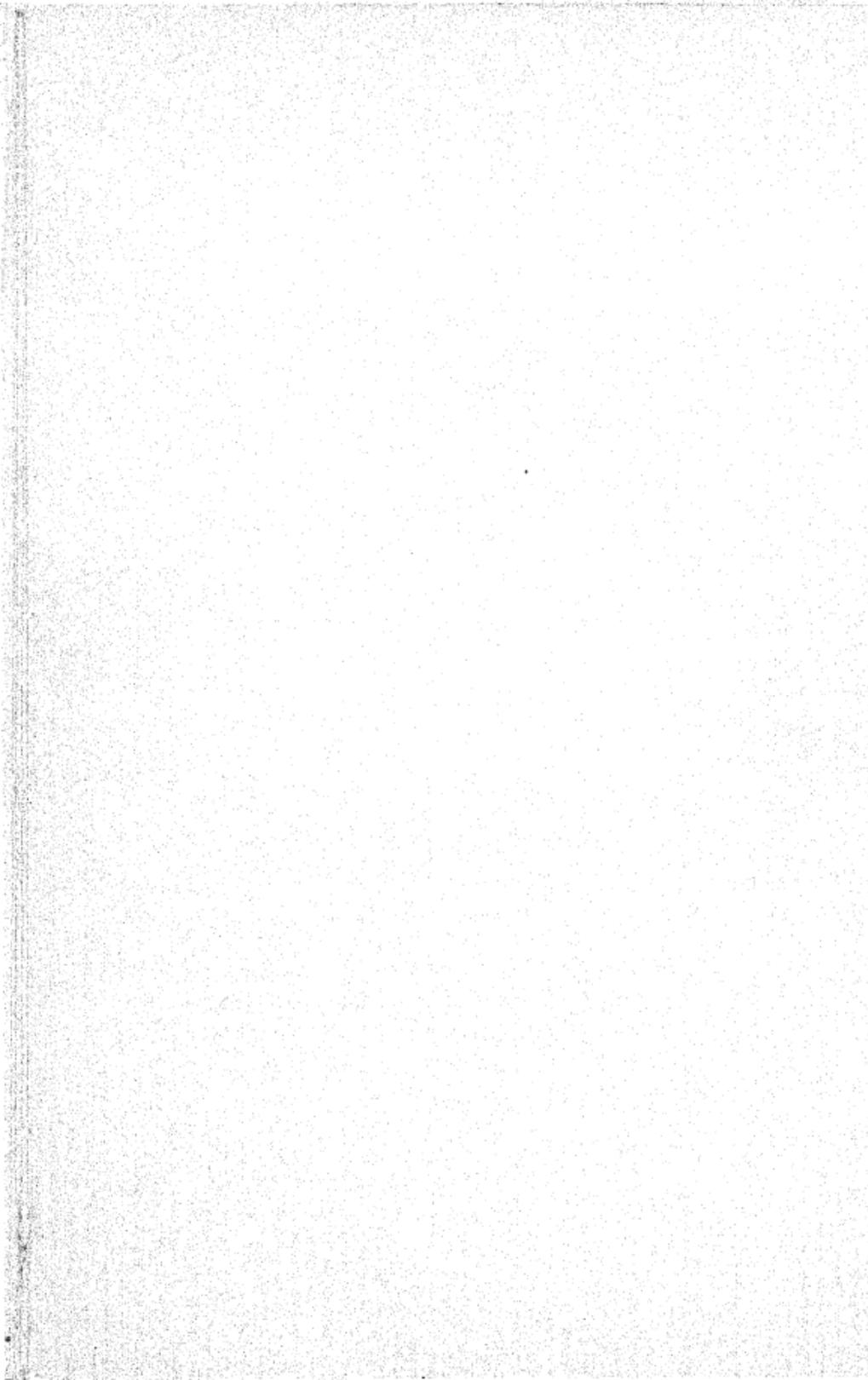


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WHAT RELIGION DOES TO MEN



I

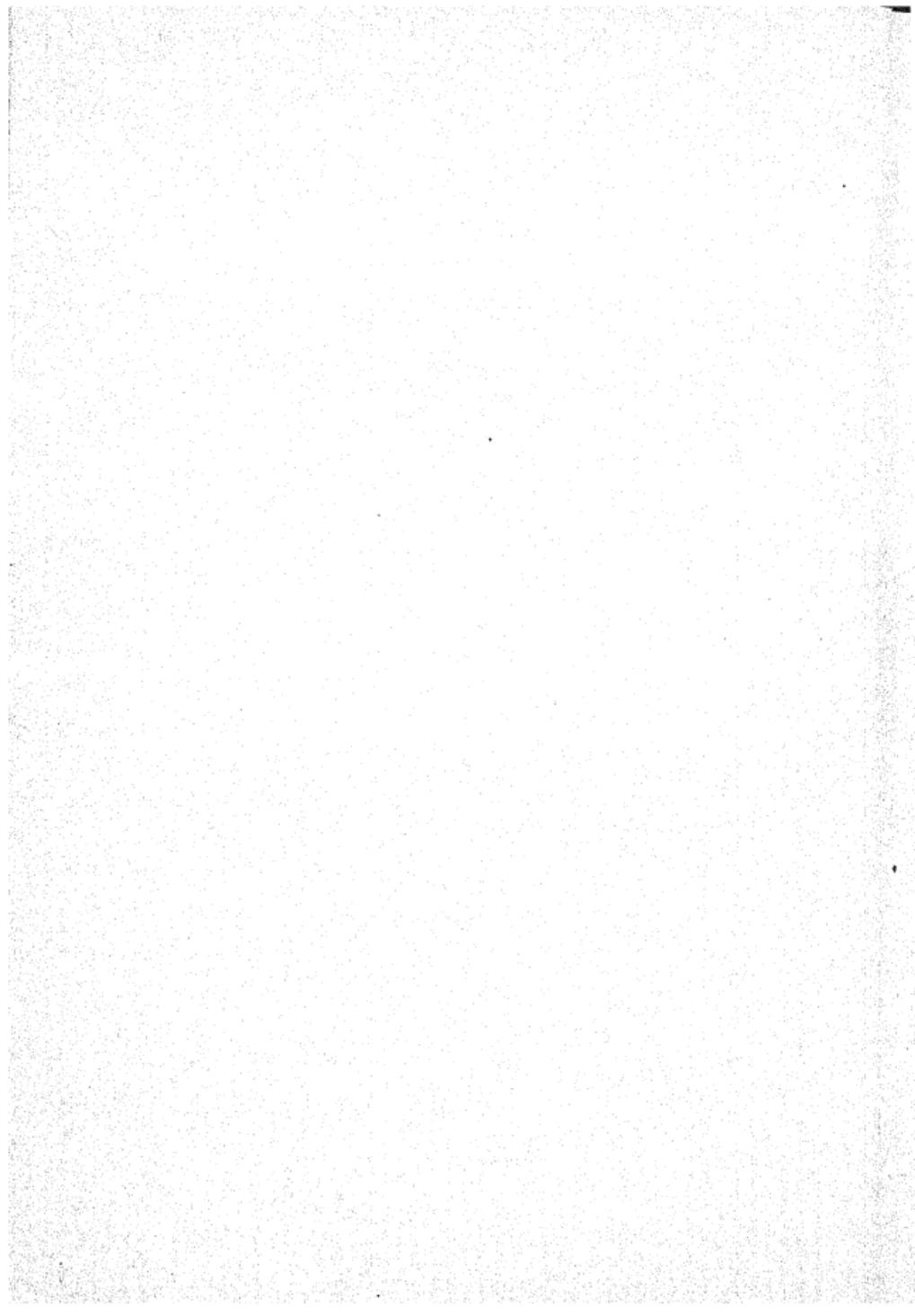
WHAT RELIGION DOES TO MEN

"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

ACTS 4:13

SOMETHING had happened to these men which made a profound difference in their lives. The authorities who questioned them were impressed with their remarkable freedom of utterance, in what for an average man would have been an embarrassing situation. For here in the courtroom were the rulers and elders and scribes, and the high priest in all his dignity, and before them stood two men from the country, men with no formal education, wanting in refinement, yet answering the charges with which they were confronted with an easy-going confidence that astonished all. As the questioning proceeded, and as the answers came clear and bold, the authorities realized that they were dealing with the kind of men of whom they had heard, men who had been with Jesus. They were different, and the difference between these men and any ordinary offender brought to trial was the difference that religion makes when it is real.

There is nothing soft about religion or religious people. The hall-mark of the man of God is boldness, a free and



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fearless confidence as he deals with life. It is a quality to be highly esteemed today, so significant, so indispensable, that we may well ask how through Christianity it can be found.

Let us begin with the boldness of conviction. The Christian looks out on his world and says, "I believe in God." We were not conceived by a universe going it blind. We are not subjected to the uncertainties of chance and fate. We are not destined to be swallowed up in a silent death where all our hopes are ended and all our strivings cease. For at the beginning of all things is God, the First Fact, and in His wisdom our lives were fashioned. And at the end of all things is God, the Last Fact, and when the labors and cares of this life are ended we shall stand in His presence and see Him face to face. "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord." That is what the Christian believes.

Conviction is always the mainspring of positive action. When a soldier no longer believes in his cause he no longer attacks with force. The well-selected diet of propaganda that maintains morale is the real food that wins a war. The Red Army drove the superior White Army mile after mile across the plains, and finally annihilated it, because the soldiers of the Red Army believed in a cause. A former German soldier, serving as an officer in the White Army, analyzes their power with this observation: "They bore on their banner neither money nor possessions, neither privileges nor concessions, but the rights of man."¹ Rightly or wrongly, that is what they believed, and because they believed, their attack had force.

¹ Erich Dwinger, *Between White and Red*.

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When a man no longer believes in his work, he loses the energy to drive through to a finished achievement. Let a teacher lose his confidence in the educational process, or the methods he must use, or the capacities of his pupils, and his efforts show a corresponding absence of vigor. On the other hand, when a man does something well, throws himself unsparingly and eagerly into his task, it is because he believes something good and hard.

According to Jesus, in the larger business of life there was one conviction that mattered supremely in the affairs of men. That was the conviction on which he staked his life from the day he met the tempter in the wilderness to the day he gave up his life on a cross. God IS, the First and Last Fact of the universe, unseen but more real than anything that we see or handle, beyond us yet somehow akin to us, infinite in wisdom yet hearing a child's prayer, with unmeasured mercy that heeds a sparrow's fall. As he believed it, so he conceived it his major work to leave that deposit of conviction in the soul of man. If we could see a soul in a laboratory, unveil it, and find at last its center, we would find in the soul of the Christian a conviction, "I believe in God."

When a man builds his life around that, he builds it in another way. God's love is mingled with his joy, and hidden in his pain. The loss of goods cannot break his heart. The inheritance of millions cannot turn his head. There are no regrets to haunt his memory, no anxious worries for what the morrow may bring. There is no withdrawal from life in hoarding or brooding or concealment, but a glad spending of himself in fields of toil,

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knowing that however obscure or foreshortened his life may be his labor is not in vain in the Lord.

He sees the breakdown of human systems, but knows that the things of God that cannot be shaken will remain. And on those things which cannot be shaken he knows his life is built. The rains descend, and the floods rise, and the winds blow and beat against that house, but it does not fall, for it is founded upon a rock. The Christian is set apart from his world by that conviction, and because he believes it he deals boldly with life.

Moreover, the Christian is bold with a great dream to which he has committed himself. Religion has always been concerned with dreams and visions. The shrine is built on the hilltop, where men see the far horizon and describe the thing that is to be. It may seem paradoxical, but the most practical service that religion renders is to teach men to dream. Religion is rooted in hope, not fear, for there is nothing to fear until some fond hope begins to fade. Don't think you can ever do without a dream. Everyone needs an adequate goal, some enterprise, some quest for a far-off good, in which he can lose himself. The people who go crazy are the people who can't get their minds off themselves. One sees them walking up and down the avenue, and with every step they seem to say: "How do I look? How do I look?" In time the strain becomes terrific. I have often wished I had the right to stop them. I would like to tell them that nobody with any discernment really cares how they look. What are you doing; what are you living for; what are your deep concerns; what do you really want? That probes the soul, gets to the substance, measures the depth of the

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inner life. You never know a person until you know what he wants, what he seeks in spite of every obstacle and spends strength and diligence to secure. The deeper tragedy is not the misspent life, but the unspent life, hoarded and kept apart from the world for oneself. The deeper failure is the failure of low aim. Thou shalt no larger be than thy desire.

The Christian's dream is derived from the nature of the God in whom he believes. The golden thread of divine purpose runs through history. In so far as we can disentangle it and understand it it is the creation of man in the image of the divine, the final perfection of the sons of God. It is not His will that any should perish. It is not His will that the weak should be exploited or the poor oppressed. For every life is precious to Him, and whatever enslaves or impoverishes the life of man is evil in His sight. The prophets had spoken of an ideal society where swords had become plowshares, where the energies of primitive instinct were harnessed to reason and virtue. The man of Nazareth kept the dream in his heart and made it the passion of his life. He saw the old Jerusalem as it was, with its publicans and harlots, its beggars and white-faced children, and yearned over it, for he saw it against the background of the New Jerusalem that was to be. Would that you were perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect! The difference between what man was and what he might become was the great concern of Jesus here on earth. And the early disciples cherished the same dream, and spent their lives to make that dream come true.

The Kingdom of Heaven is the dream to which the

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Christian gives himself. It is a shattered dream today. Nations are drawing farther apart, rattling the sword, preparing multitudes of young men for another harvest of death. It is difficult to escape the cynical mood of Thomas Hardy in his little verse:

Peace upon earth was said; we sing it,
And pay a million priests to bring it.
After two thousand years of mass,
We've got as far as poison gas.

What then? Was Jesus mad? One grows a little weary of hearing that today. Alongside of our modern dreamers, megalomaniacs, with mailed fist and bloodshot angry eyes, the Nazarene seems uncommonly sane and hopeful. At least the disciples thought so, and went out to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield. So they left their accustomed habits of life, gave up mending their nets and peddling fish, and went over the Judean hills to preach good news to men.

Religion has been called a citadel of hope built on the edge of despair. Despair is all about us today. We seem to be standing right on the edge of it. The more reason for the Christian to build well the citadel of hope. The more reason that he refuse to believe that any of our devastating social ills are necessary. The more reason that he rebel against the periodic destruction of man's work and art. The more reason that he stand confidently and stubbornly for the things in human life that are just and honorable and brave and decent and clean.

The story is told of an Indian chieftain whose three sons went to a distant mountain to bring him a gift on his anniversary. The first brought beautiful wild flowers

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which he had gathered halfway up the mountain. The next brought precious stones which he had found farther up the trail. The youngest and bravest came last. His hands were empty, and bruised from the long climb, for he had reached the summit of barren rock, and there was nothing there that he could bring. "But from the heights," he said, "I caught sight of the sea."

Such men may yet show a darkened world the way. Men who have been impatient of mediocrity. Men who refuse to reduce everything to the dead level of prudence. Men whose hands are empty, perhaps, and worn, but whose hearts are beating wildly, for from the heights they have caught sight of the sea. They live boldly, for they have committed themselves to a great dream.

Moreover, the Christian is bold with a sense of power available for all his needs. The disciples were ordinary men like ourselves, familiar with the cares and hopes and disappointments which befall us. Yet they were confident that no matter how difficult life might become, it would never be too much for them. Their strength was pressed to the limit at times, but when it reached the limit it became not weakness, but the strength of God.

I shall not attempt to explain how religion effects this paradox of strength in weakness. However, if you consider some of the ways in which human beings use up their energy, you can readily understand how religion enables them to conserve it. In anxious worry about the things that never happen, in feverish haste to accomplish something that doesn't matter, in vain pursuit of the things we can't get and don't need. Surely anything which

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introduces a little composure into our frantic moods becomes at once an agency of power.

At Atlantic City, on the one hand of the board walk are all the glittering changing trifles which entertain and please us for a moment. On the other hand is the wideness of the open sea. But, curiously enough, the benches along the board walk are so arranged that people who pause to rest must sit with their backs to the sea. And many people live that way, moving from one pleasure to another until they are weary, and then resting with their eyes fixed on the things that are here today and gone tomorrow. It isn't even half of life, to live in only one world, to face the care and the monotony of long years, to suffer pain, and to know sorrow, and to deal with death, with your back turned on the realities of the spiritual world.

The Christian turns toward the sea, gathers into his soul all of its wideness and depth and strength, and sees the particular event against that background, in its proper setting. The cup that runs over is filled with the goodness of God. In the valley of the shadow there is comfort in the staff of God. Always there is the reference from this particular trial or joy to its deeper and final meaning. Even tragedy has some meaning when it is properly framed. So when his spirit is heavy and weariness overtakes him, the Christian turns toward the open sea, to the things of God, and the restoration of his strength is like the silent inflow of a great tide. He is a stronger man, better equipped to make a clear decision, to effect a reconciliation, to find delight in common things, to go

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through the deep waters, and to come face to face with death.

Rufus Jones has pointed out that man lived for thousands of years before he discovered that electrical energy fills all space, and touches our lives at every point. It is closer than the air we breathe. But it is revealed only when matter is so organized as to let it come through and operate. What a discovery that was! Likewise a man makes a great discovery when he knows that the deeper forces of the universe are spiritual, and can so organize his life as to let them come through and work in him. The Christian has found that secret. The universe works with him, is on his side, conspires his well-being, furthers his undertakings, secures his hopes. We know that all things work together for good to those that love God. There is power available for all our needs. When a man knows that, he can mount up with wings as the eagle, he can run and not be weary, he can walk and not faint. He deals boldly with life.

Finally the Christian is confident because he knows the companionship of an unseen Friend. It is not good for man to live alone. A joy is so much the more perfect when there are others to share it. A care is so much easier to endure when another can understand. We need the balance and correction of other minds, the sparkle of another's humor, the contagion of another's cheer, the strength of other hands beneath the load. And there are times when human comradeship is not enough. There are wounds that need the touch of divine fingers. There are perplexities that yield only to the wisdom that is from

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above. There are moments when nothing short of His grace can turn our weakness into strength.

"Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the world." I believe those words are true. I believe that today he is with us in our worship, and tonight as we break bread. And when we close our eyes in slumber we feel the benediction of his peace. He is with this lad who is off to school tomorrow, and the man at his desk, and the mother who stands by a stove. He is with that man in a far-off sanitarium, struggling to regain his health. He is with little children laughing in their play, with young men and women standing on the threshold of life, with the aged across whose paths the shadows have begun to lengthen, whose eyes are toward the setting sun. If that be true, it is a glorious truth. Through the ages, prophet and priest and saint and martyr, by their prayers and their gifts and their vows, by noble dream and faithful effort, have declared that the word of the Nazarene is true.

Why art thou cast down, oh Christian? You have a conviction about God. Your life is committed to a great dream. There is power available for all your needs. You walk by the side of an unseen Friend. These things you have learned from Jesus, and you can deal boldly with life.

II

CONCERNING THE FUTURE

"And I bought the field of Hanameel, my uncle's son, that was in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver. . . . For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land."

JEREMIAH 32:9, 15

CAN we believe in the future? This is perhaps the most vital question in our minds today. The times have been out of joint, the soul of man afflicted with a combination of strange disorders. We have been sick, but what about the future? Are we going to get well? We can realize how much that matters if we consider the difference between two men in a hospital, both lying helplessly, their bodies racked with pain, but one knowing in his heart that he is on the road to recovery, while the other knows, despite the assurance of the doctor, that he will die. Think of the differences in mental outlook, in hope and confidence, in resistance to the present ills.

If we are not to recover, it will be hard on the old folks, with their incomes pinched, deprived of the modest comforts for which they had saved so carefully through the years. It will be even worse for the younger people. Think of the prospect of reaching twenty-one in a world

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where nobody wants you, where nobody gives you a chance. What good is all this education, this professional training, this knowledge and technical skill in a world that's going to pot? So hope gives way to resignation, and ambition is killed off when it ought to be most lively. What then shall we believe about the days to come?

Jeremiah was hopeful when everyone else in the city was staying in behind locked doors. He bought some property at the very time that the Chaldean army was preparing to storm the city gates. "For thus saith the Lord, Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land."

It was the more remarkable because Jeremiah was generally regarded as the gloomiest prophet of his times. When everything was going smoothly, he warned of danger ahead. The nation was running blindly into trouble. His contemporaries were all cheerful prophets, dreaming of bigger and better things, and they detested Jeremiah. He made some pointed remarks about the king one day, so he was promptly dropped into a dungeon with a wooden collar around his neck. But Jeremiah kept on prophesying. He had no audience, so he wrote out his messages and gave them to a friend to read. The king, outwardly indifferent, was secretly curious, and securing the writings of Jeremiah, gave them to his servant and listened while he read. After the servant had read a few lines, the king stood up in anger, seized the roll, cut it in shreds, and burned it in the fire. Unhappily, however, one can't get rid of an unpleasant truth by tossing it in the fireplace. Jeremiah started to write again, with a few timely additions, and he said among other things that

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Jehoiakim, the king, would be "buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates."

In due course the Chaldeans took the city and slew the king. A rope was tied around his heels, and he was dragged out on the road, and dumped in a shallow hole, with no mourners, and no stone to mark his grave. The Chaldeans took a number of prisoners, and what gold they could find, and went their way. The temple, however, was left standing, and the city enjoyed a breathing-spell.

But it was not for long, for in a few years the invaders returned, locating their battering-rams and siege-engines outside the wall. Then it was that everyone despaired of any deliverance. The cheerful prophets were nowhere to be found, for no one would listen to them. But Jeremiah, the gloomy prophet, became the consolation and the hope of his people. He was the one bright spot in the entire city, for the word passed swiftly that Jeremiah was buying land. His cousin needed money and had come to Jeremiah, for according to Jewish custom the kinsmen had prior rights, and the property that had been in the family for generations was very precious to the heirs. So Jeremiah reached in his pocket for seventeen shekels of silver, and paid the purchase price for the field in Anathoth. "For thus saith the Lord, Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land."

Twenty-five years ago there were many confident voices in our pulpits announcing and expounding the gospel of progress. Progress was the dominant idea of our times. Then came a war for glorious ideals, and we emerged from the conflict with our confidence in progress strength-

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ened. We had made the world safe for democracy. The League of Nations and the World Court and the Kellogg Pact were the symbols of this new age which had passed from force to persuasion, and the Great War had ended war. Then the bottom fell out of our prosperity. Little by little we began to sense the staggering burden of debt. The machine which had given us so many physical comforts seemed to stand between the poor man and a job. Armies and navies were increasing, democracy was on the way out, the peoples of the earth were poor, and in desperation seemed ready to fight again. The dreamers of a brighter world and better day have nothing to say, and no one will listen to them. We have been told that another war might end our civilization, and we know that another war might break out in a week's time. There are too many nervous fingers playing about the triggers of loaded guns. The Chaldeans are at the gate. And the one and only bright spot that I can find in all this is religion. For religion always believes in the future.

We have lived through a period when religion was ignored by many people as unnecessary in modern life. You know how many of your friends have dropped it right out of their lives as something that they don't really need and haven't room for any more. We have lived through a period when religion was scorned by many of our intellectuals. It is incredible; it doesn't square with science; a hangover of primitive superstition; you can't prove it; nobody who is really educated believes in a personal God nowadays. That is familiar to us, and may I say, painfully old-fashioned and stupid. So we have seen it driven out of the central affairs of men, this tre-

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mendous agency of confidence, this stabilizing factor that makes the difference between the sick man who knows he is going to die and the sick man who knows he will get well. The one great hindrance to recovery—and by recovery I do not mean recovery of goods or even of virtue, but recovery of reason—the one great hindrance to recovery is man's refusal to believe in it. Disillusioned, in the grip of forces beyond himself, missing sorely that vision without which the people perish, that confidence born of the religion that he despised. Faith in the future is the hinge on which the future turns. So religion is the brightest spot in man's life today, for religion gives that faith. Go buy the field, for houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land.

Religion gives two reasons for this confidence in the future. The first is that deeper than the evil in our nature lies the good. You would not believe that if you made your appraisal of human nature on the basis of the newspaper and the movie. For all the crime and all the misery of mankind make the front page in large type. And the movie still majors in the irregular conduct of the few and not the wholesome goodness of the many. Every city has its list of those wanted by the police, but just feel the weight of a city directory with its countless names of those not wanted. Every state has its reform schools for delinquent children, but think of our public schools crowded to the doors with normal healthy children. Every community has its domestic tragedy, but look down from yonder mountain on houses as far as the eye can reach, where families live in understanding and trust. Surely the evil in man's nature is outweighed by the good.

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There are millions of children in this land, and that means twice as many million parents. Look into the heart of every parent, and there you will see his dream for his child, strong in body, noble in heart. There isn't a man who wants his son to walk in evil ways, least of all the man who has known those ways himself. Even the gangster wants his boy to go to college, to live among his fellows, and not beneath them or against them. That universal concern of parents is bound to accomplish some measure of human goodness, just as certainly as a farmer's concern for a field of wheat will bring forth at last his harvest.

Alongside a highway in Michigan is a large sign, "Free coffee for truck-drivers." When horses were driven there were occasional signs pointing to watering-places for thirsty animals. There on a highway through the forest, some miles from the nearest town, some one thought of truck-drivers, and of their long monotonous work, and of the mishaps when sometimes they fall asleep. It might prevent an accident, perhaps even save a life, and at least it would cheer them and warm them on cold nights, so why not give a cup of coffee to those who drive trucks? Kindness spreads itself, and the passing motorist, although not entitled to stop, may remember to be kind to people in need.

Tomorrow's paper will tell us of some one who was shot down and robbed, and we say life is cheap and human nature is hard. But it isn't. For here is a hospital dedicated to the proposition that life is sacred, and every day and night surgeons and nurses are working to save it.

Captain Scott wrote in his diary, "We could have made

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it if we had not cared for our sick." So they went ten miles a day instead of twenty, because they carried their sick on their sledges and refused to leave them. They would not escape the winter that was overtaking them if it meant leaving their sick behind. Some one will say that self-preservation is the deepest motive. Every fellow for himself. It is so for the animals, but not for man. For there are times when men would rather save their honor than their lives. "We could have made it if we had not cared for our sick."

Deeper than the evil lies the good. Put them opposite each other in an open field. Let them fight it out, and evil hasn't a ghost of a chance. What is it, black or white? Religion gambles everything that white will win at last. There is a future for man. The Chaldean army may be storming the city. They may smash our world to bits. They may level our buildings to the ground, and carry off our treasures. But they can't destroy the goodness of the human soul. When the noise of battle is ended and the dust has settled, the soul of man will live on, and rebuild the old waste places, and fashion a better world. So buy the field. Invest everything you have in the future. Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again, for deeper than the evil in our nature lies the good.

The second reason that religion gives for believing in the future is that God rules the destiny of man. The Old Testament poet, aware of his burden and loss, regains his assurance when he reflects on God. "My times are in thy hand." Here there is a question, even among religious people. I know that God speaks to the soul of man. I

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know that God reveals Himself in nature, and while the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease. But while God may reach the soul, and manifest Himself in nature, I think He lets human history alone. Man is free to do as he pleases. Nation can rise up against nation. Armies can hurl themselves at each other. Man can destroy his work and his art, and even himself, without any interference from God.

It is true in part, but only in part. God does give man his freedom within limits, but those limits are clearly and finally set by the moral structure of the universe. Just as the physical order, composed of a great diversity of elements, permits man to do a great many things, and denies him the power to do others, so the moral order offers its tremendous opportunities, and makes its absolute and final denials.

For this moral universe in which we live is built around a central and abiding sanctity, the life of man. Any system that is not fundamentally *humane* is doomed before it begins. Human slavery was finally abolished by a more perfect insight into the worth of man. The caste system is crumbling, undermined at last by the same truth. There is a question that every social system, every religious creed, every industrial enterprise, every government, and even every dictator must face. Does this enrich the life of man? If it does not, it cannot last.

A Nazarene stood on a hilltop and declared the principles of the ideal society, and the keynote of every principle was respect for man, who bears the image of the divine. Whoever hears these words and does them is like

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a wise man who builds his house upon a rock. And whoever hears these words and does them not is like a foolish man who builds on sand. "And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell. And great was the fall of it."

God in history? Yes! For the rock is there, the token, the witness, the evidence, if you please, of a universe that must go God's way. Man can choose how he would build. He is free to build anywhere he pleases. But there is one thing that man cannot do. He cannot build on the sand and survive the tempest and the flood. So God works, not by compulsion, but by the disciplines of His truth persuading the will, and by the judgment of the rock.

Jehoiakim, like certain others of our times, was a megalomaniac, drunk with power, flaunting the laws of God, and violating the central rights of man. It can't be done in this kind of world, for the rock is there. And it was a truthful word that his burial would be like the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the city gates. God rules the destiny of man that way, and because He does there is a future, not for the violent, but for the just, not for those who have armies, but for those who have truth, not for the mighty, but for the meek.
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

The Chaldeans are outside the walls with battering-rams and siege-engines. The lights are turned low, and people are behind locked doors. The shadows of despair hang over us. But in all the darkness of these times the one bright spot of religion remains. Will there be a future? Go tell the word to everyone that Jeremiah is buying land. "For thus saith the Lord, Houses and

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fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land." And tell that lad of eighteen to aim high, and train well his mind, and hold fast to the things that are good. For tomorrow the doors will open to men of character, of business training and technical skill, to men who can heal and men who can teach. Tomorrow will come with rich rewards for a clear mind and a sound body, and a brave and generous heart. Tomorrow will come, for deeper than the evil lies the good, and God rules the destiny of man. Blessed is the man who buys the field today, who invests his life in the days to come.

III

BEGGARS AND BEAUTIFUL GATES

"In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

Act 3:6

WE TURN today to the story of the lame beggar who lay by the temple gate which was called Beautiful. There may have been some who thought he belonged elsewhere, but from every standpoint he had chosen the right place. He knew that it was the best place in the city to beg, for the people most likely to help him were those who believed in God and went regularly to worship. The Church may be lacking in many virtues, but people who need bread and butter usually find that religious folk won't turn them down.

Furthermore, this man wanted above all else to walk as others did, and to enter into the temple and be one of the great congregation. While he had never walked through that gate, he lived near it—as near as possible to the fulfillment of his deepest desire. If you can't find the answer to some worthy hope, it is good to live as near as possible to that answer. The door may be closed, but if you stay near it, and it opens for a fleeting moment, you won't miss it because you are somewhere else. By the Beautiful Gate was a good place, even for the man who could not enter it.

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It was also good for those who went each Sabbath to the temple, to be obliged to look at him. When they were tempted to be proud of all that they could do with balance and line, with stones and jewels and colored glass, he reminded them of how little they could do with people like himself. They saw the contrast between man's power in dealing with nature, and man's helplessness in dealing with man. Inside the temple they saw the loveliness of heavenly things, as they worshiped God in the beauty of holiness. On their way out they were reminded of the sorrows of the same God. The beggar may have done more than the preacher to keep the religion of that temple close to the real world.

One afternoon Peter and John came into the temple to pray. The hand of the lame man went out, and his pitiful eyes turned upward as Peter spoke to him. "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee." There is no justification here for those who don't want to give to the poor. The reason why the apostles gave no money was, according to their own statement, because they didn't have it. The New Testament is a poor place to look for any defense of a closed purse. The kindness of the Good Samaritan was not complete until he had paid for the traveler's lodging. The turning-point in Zaccheus' life was when he gave half of his goods to the poor. And the stumbling-block in the young ruler's quest was the clear word of Jesus, "Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me." Peter and John, so far from withholding, were giving their lives for the poor of every sort.

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On the other hand, the truth is made very plain that almsgiving is not enough. Christianity is more than bread and coffee. The gospel in its fullness means a new life of power, where a man is lifted from the level of the outstretched hand to the level where he walks and leaps and praises God as other men do. "Such as I have," said the apostle. "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" Such as he had was not only for the poor in a material way, but for all who look at the Beautiful Gate, and hear the strains of sweet music, and see the glad eager faces of people entering, and catch for a moment a glimpse of the beauty within, and know that the gate opens to a life that they have always wanted, of friendship and joy and freedom, and long to enter the gate, but cannot.

Here for example is a person in the grip of evil. The good that I would I do not. The evil that I would not, that I do. Like many a slave, he hates his master, but goes on serving, for nothing he has found can set him free. The new freedom is multiplying slaves of that sort. First a man lets his impulses loose, confident that at any time he can recall them and assert his self-mastery. Then one day he finds that his own desires have tied him up. He begins the struggle to regain his freedom. He wants the full consent of his inner nature for the judgments of his better self. He wants the full cooperation of his instinctive energy in accomplishments that are right and good. He will not be defeated or embarrassed by a desire that strikes out for its own object, tearing his idealism to shreds. So he struggles. But what he sowed he must reap. The habits so easily formed are not so easily broken.

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At last he gives up the struggle, accepting a divided nature for which he has no relish, but from which he finds no escape. He lives outside a gate that opens to a life of self-mastery and joy. His hand is outstretched and he calls for help.

You shake your head and say it's no use. You have known people like that and you have tried to help them. You have heard their solemn promise, and you found them a week later back on the old level. You tried that two or three times, and gave up, and left the habit-bound man with his habit. The Founder of our religion said that if we had faith as a grain of mustard-seed we could move a mountain. Where Christians have no faith Jesus Christ has no power. But once be persuaded that nothing can limit his grace, that no bonds are so strong but he can break them, that no passion is so consuming but his passion can consume it, and the Master will do miracles in your day and before your eyes. Man's extremity is still God's opportunity. Where psychology shakes its head, religion gets to work. Strength in weakness is always the marvelous paradox of religion. When a man gives over a lost cause to God, if it be a good cause, and if he has faith, the tide turns at that point. I'll go on to the end of my ministry preaching about a Christ who can reach down into the most wretched life and cleanse and save, for I have seen with my own eyes the captive set free. Whether it be thirst, or an uncontrolled passion, or a violent temper that keeps a man begging outside the gate, we can say, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

Or here is another person who longs to enter the gate,

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but cannot because of a sense of sadness that forever dogs his existence. It may be a sharp throbbing pain, the unhappy remembrance of an injury done to another. A parent who has failed to lead his son aright, a youth who treated his father and mother shabbily until it was too late to show them his true love, a broken promise that was never meant, a sum of money that was taken and not returned. Or it may be the dull heavy weight of realizing that the years have been lean and fruitless, the hopes and ambitions of youth are forsaken and past fulfillment, there is no memory of real achievement to gladden the aging heart.

A repenting person once confessed to St. Francis the sin of careless gossip. By way of penance he was told to take a goose and walk through the village plucking out a feather at each step. When he had completed this he was told to retrace his steps and gather all the feathers. It couldn't be done, for they had blown away. The gossip once released could not be recalled. There are some sins for which there is no human restoration. They are woven into the fabric of the past. What is done is done. But here is the mystery and wonder of God's forgiveness. It is the wandering careless mortal more than anyone else who feels the full impact of God's love. The sheep that is lost concerns the Good Shepherd. The far-off prodigal living on husks is the lad for whom the Father waits. The last and the least and the lost were the objects of the Nazarene's redemptive quest. To them he brought the peace that passeth knowledge, the peace of a Father's forgiveness, not of the righteous but of sinners.

The place to realize this is not always in church, but

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alone with yourself and God, in your room with the door shut, or on some hilltop far from the tumult of daily life. There where the noises of the world are silent and the silences of God begin to speak, you look up toward the heavens and marvel at God's mercy made known in Jesus Christ. If a sense of your own unfitness has kept you outside the gate that leads to a full life, never forget that the Master came to seek and to save the unfit. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.

Outside the gate is also the person who lives in strained relationships with others. Nobody in this world can call his life complete until he has found companionship. He may have buildings and lands, he may wield power in the affairs of state, he may be distinguished by professional achievements, but it is one thing to have a great name, and another to have a great experience of life. In every congregation there are some who are satisfied in all other respects save this: they are conscious of barriers or friction in their relationships with those who by every natural circumstance should be close to them.

Domestic difficulties usually resolve themselves into a problem of wills. Sometimes the stronger will absorbs the weaker. One member leads the way. The other trails along. I heard of a home where a man and wife lived together for fifty years, "with never a word, for she never crossed his will." There is something tragic about that. One sees a kind of domestic peace gained at the cost of individuality. It would be better, in my judgment, to have a few words, than to surrender one's selfhood to another human will. Sometimes the conflict is settled by

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compromise. They agree to disagree. Lines are clearly drawn between mine and thine. What began as a romance ends in a truce. But something of the true character of love is lost, for love is only perfect when the distinction between mine and thine disappears. Or sometimes they are driven into open separation because they find themselves incompatible, a discovery that two vigorous and self-willed personalities are likely to make at close range. This accounts for the greater proportion of broken modern homes. It is not the lure and fascination of the outside world that breaks up a marriage. The outside world presents its secondary appeal when the home itself has lost its romance and joy.

Let me describe a modern home which had every blessing that people commonly seek. They enjoyed comforts and luxuries. The parents were educated and refined, successful according to the standards of the world. They were blessed with children. Yet they had drifted outside the gate. They were beginning to find their happiness separately and not together, which is always a danger signal. But at this stage they found, through a few friends, the meaning of Christ in their home. He became their Master in a literal sense of the word. Here was no surrender to a human will, but to the divine. And here was not the loss of personality, but the fulfillment. And here was a new comradeship, born of the Spirit, as together they put self in the second place, and God first. They began the experience of prayer together with their children. Their outlook on life has changed, and the unrealities of their former existence have been left behind. Bound together in trust and understanding, their love has become beauti-

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ful in Christ. They have entered the Beautiful Gate. And their message to all such, far more impressive than any sermon is, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"

There is yet one more person who lingers outside the temple gate. He knows no moral bondage. He has no deep-seated regrets about life. He is on good terms with others. But like many who have come of age since the war, he is touched by the mood of futility that hangs over his generation. He has pleasures here and there, but he lacks the nourishment of a purpose. There doesn't seem to be anything outside himself for which he can live, to which he can pledge his absolute loyalty. Something tells him that a life at its best is a life in those terms—dedication to a cause that carries one beyond all thought of self. But there seems to be no movement of the day that makes such demands. The last great enterprise was the war, and it made everyone suspicious of idealism. Yet life without an exacting idealism is just existence. An undergraduate told me that he wished he had been born in the days of the Crusades, when there was a clear challenge to the hero in every soul. He has been looking in vain for its modern counterpart. Finding nothing, he and others in his condition live for themselves, not hard of heart, but possessing a mellow kind of selfishness that doesn't satisfy, but remains for lack of something better. They see the Beautiful Gate, but they aren't sure that there is much inside, or anywhere, for that matter.

If there be any such here this morning let me say that I have sat and wondered where you sit. But if there ever was a time when Christianity had something to offer, and

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something to demand of people like you, it is now. You dislike conformity, and that dislike I would like to claim for the Master. The most unconventional thing a person could do today would be to build his life from the foundations up on the words of the New Testament. If you must be a non-conformist, be a non-conformist in a way that counts. You love to experiment, and that love I would like to claim for the Master. We don't ask you to believe, but to discover. Sit down before the fact of Christ as you do before any fact. Ask what that fact means in terms of personal and social life, in terms of politics and economics, in terms of religion and God. But before you sit before that Fact, be willing to live by what you find. You have an adventurous spirit, and that spirit I would like to claim for the Master. Plan your spiritual career as you would a flight across the sea. Get a copy of the New Testament and read it as a new book. Find out how it is to be done. Consider quietly and carefully the cost. Examine carefully your resources, especially your integrity and courage. If there is any adventure today with greater demands and greater satisfactions than the adventure of Christianity, I would like to know what it is. The time has come for a movement of youth as drastic and radical, as uncompromising and inspiring, as the little band of disciples who went like a saving caravan over the Judean hills. Let it sweep through the church like fire. It will burn the moss off some of our sanctified customs, and even off some of our saints, but the church will know and the world will know that the Beautiful Gate of Christianity has swung wide, and through its portals we can enter gladly into life. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!

IV

FOR SUCH A TIME

"Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

ESTHER 4:14

THE Persian king had chosen Esther to be his wife. He did not know that she was a member of the Jewish race which had been scattered in little groups throughout the empire. And being a king whose desire was law, he did not care. Her guardian, Mordecai, had offended an ambitious noble named Haman because Mordecai refused to bow and salute him when he passed by. Haman nursed his resentment and waited for a chance to get even. One evening when the king was mildly intoxicated, Haman told him of the disloyalty of the Jews, who had no respect for the king or his officers, and who did not obey the laws. The king called his scribes together and issued an order which was sent to every province, requiring that on a certain day all Jews, men, women, and children, should be put to death. When this order was made known the Jews began to fast and mourn, and to put on sack-cloth and to lie in ashes, as was their custom in times of great distress.

Esther, the queen, was in a difficult position. If she did nothing to help her own people, they would perish.

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If she made known her identity to the king, and interceded for her people, she might perish with them, for the king's orders were not easily revoked. She was faced with the possibility of losing everything that she had, including her own life, and she began to feel very sorry for herself. When she hesitated to do anything, fearing the consequences, Mordecai suggested that there was another way of looking at the whole affair. What seemed to her a great calamity was really a great opportunity. "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

The outcome of the story does not concern us much. It is enough to say that Mordecai's suggestion was all that Esther needed. Taking her life in her hands, she went before the king, and on behalf of her people she made her plea. And because she was able to save her people, the book of Esther was written, and to this day the name of Esther is remembered with affection by the Jews. It was a great calamity that made her great, for she saw in it an opportunity which God had given.

There is a philosophy implied in Mordecai's question which is our main consideration today. Confronted with difficulties on every hand, who knows whether you've come into the world according to God's providence for such a time as this? The philosophy of Mordecai's question suggests that there are two levels on which a person lives his life. One is on the surface where men hate and fear and struggle and sometimes starve. On that level man reaps the harvest of his own sowing, whether good or evil.

As human beings who are a part of a great economic

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and social system, we must live on that level, and today we are tasting the consequences of years of folly. We sowed a wind and we reaped a whirlwind. We sowed fear and hate and we reaped a war. We sowed greed and we reaped a depression. We sowed to the flesh and of the flesh we reaped corruption. The world has become a hard, unsatisfactory place for many people who are trying their best to live in it. People who have work at all are hanging on in many cases just by their finger tips. Suffering from heavy losses, burdened with debts, anxious about the morrow, and waiting vainly for some improvement, the world seems less than a decent place for the pursuit of happiness. Life has become a struggle. It is hard to see it as anything less than a calamity, and there are few people who are not feeling very sorry for themselves. That is one level of life, and we know it pretty well.

But there is a deeper level on which men of religion have always lived. Our times, strange as they are, are in His hand. The folly of man lies deep, but deeper still is the wisdom of God. Human strength passes its limits, but instead of becoming weakness, it becomes the strength of God. Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of His understanding. On the surface man plants his thorns and thistles, and the major vanity of our times is our attempt to gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles. But all the while God sows His wisdom, and nourishes with His love, and when the harvest is ripe He gathers the fruits of His purpose.

Whatever happens on the surface, man's life is rooted

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in something deeper. Rich or poor, happy or dismayed, drinking a cup that overflows with goodness, or hungry for bread, he is still a part of a divine purpose. His life is woven into the pattern of a heavenly kingdom. It is that plan, divinely conceived, that gives peace in all his conflict, and strength for all his toil, that sanctifies his deep distress, and gives to common things strange overtones of meaning.

There was a man in the Old Testament named Elijah. He was fleeing for his life. The soldiers of Jezebel were on his trail. Weary and hungry and hard pressed, he had fled into the wilderness. It was all wind and fire and earthquake for him. Hatred and pride and jealousy and revenge were the forces that were closing in on him. He prayed that he might die. That was one level. But after the wind and the fire and the earthquake, there came from a deeper level a still small voice. "What doest thou here?" It was the question of Mordecai, "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

There was a man in the New Testament—The Man—named Jesus. The hatred of the scribes had become fixed and violent. It had ripened into the purpose to do away with him. At the end of the road he could see a cross. He was to be executed as a common criminal. For honesty and truth and love he had lived. But self-will and self-love and the hate which they kindled were carrying him to a shameful death. That was one level. But from a deeper level he could see it in another way. It was from that level that he spoke when he said, "The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified."

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No matter what happens to a man on the surface, there comes from a deeper level, out of the hidden recesses of faith, the saving question of religion, "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Adversity always does something to us. It never leaves us just as we were before. When a man finds his inner life struggling with temptation or pain or loss, he will be either weaker or stronger for the experience. At one time or another we must all put our lives where they can be hammered on the anvil of hard experience, and after the hammering we are either broken in pieces or we are more unified than we ever were before. Either we become cynical and indifferent, with shortened vision and contracted sympathies, or we have more understanding and gentleness, we see farther, our wills are more resolute, our hearts better equipped with courage and hope. One of these two things this depression is doing to all of us, and while I don't know of any way out of it, thank God I know a way over it. When times seem worst, and we all feel hopeless and dismayed, there rises from the deeper levels of life the question of religion, "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

I have in mind a type of family which abounds in this community. In normal times they were moderately comfortable. They had saved a little to educate their children and start them off. They went to the mountains or the seashore for a few days in the summer, and they planned for a future day a real vacation in Europe. The last few years, however, have used up their savings. The husband hasn't bought a suit for several years. His wife does all

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her own work. He still goes to his office, but like everyone else with a job, he isn't making anything. They are right back where they started twenty years ago. It's all right to begin that way when you have youth and health and romance and ambition. But it isn't so good when you're nearly fifty and go down in a dark cellar to carry out your ashes. Hard work is all right when you can see results. But when you can't see them, you wonder what's the use. That's one way of looking at it, and when you see it on that level, it's a calamity. But as a Christian your life has deeper roots and your religion meets you with this question, Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

Somebody must be in your home at a time like this. Somebody must stand with his back to the wall, with victory in his eyes, a bulwark of courage and hope. Somebody must speak gently to your wife, and help her with her toil, and comfort her in her anxiety. Somebody must be a father to your children and show them the meaning of a manly life, how to pray to the great Refuge of all human distress, how to face disappointment without brooding, how to find in the wreckage of material loss the treasures of truth and art and character and faith. Somebody must do that. Who can do it better than you?

You love your parents, and the parents of many have gone from this earth. Why do you love them and honor them? Because with what little they had they did so much. They didn't live in much of a house, but it was a wonderful home, through their spirit. The proof of your mother's love was in her hands of toil. You honor your father because he worked faithfully, and lived simply, and was kind to your mother, and gentle and wise

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in his counsel with his children. The real marks of nobility are not in clothes or property, but in the stalwart heart. In the homes up and down the streets of this community somebody must live that way today. Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

I have in mind also the great numbers of young men and women trained for business and professional leadership in colleges and universities. Some of them are working in filling-stations and some are bellhops, and some are selling ribbon in a five-and-ten-cent store, and some are just sitting at home, waiting. It's a calamity for them to mark time when, uncertain of their own abilities, they are so anxious to prove their worth. Some of them are feeling very sorry for themselves.

But religion meets them with a saving question. Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? Somebody must come and show people the way out. Somebody must tell a world the real reason for its torment. Somebody must probe our economic system not as an economist, but as a moralist, for the real difficulty is in the selfishness of man. Somebody must tell us that our systems are systems of self-love, and carry in themselves the seeds of their own death. Somebody must tell us that a social order that is warlike, materialistic, and acquisitive will sooner or later break up on the rocks of its own passion, and that the only deliverance is through a new spirit in the life of man. Our primary need today is not for experience. Our primary need is for vision. And where will you find it except in the mind of youth, where love has not yet turned in on self?

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The stage is set for moral leadership in labor and industry, in politics, in the church, for men and women who see their lives in terms of some God-given purpose. Mordecai appears to thousands of young men and women, who see nothing but a calamity, and he challenges them to turn it into an opportunity. When the nation is suffering for its want of intelligence and vision, who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

My last word is to all those who profess the Christian religion. You share in the trouble of the surface level. But your life gets its final meaning from a deeper level, where God's plan includes it. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul reminds the Christians of their duty, "to live as faultless children of God in the midst of a crooked age, in which you appear like stars in a dark world, offering men the message of life." When you feel sorry for yourself, get down to the deeper level. Your neighbor, your best friend, may be in the darkness of trouble and disappointment. His life is precious to God. Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

There is an old evangelistic song, written fifty years ago, that most of you know.

Brightly gleams our Father's mercy,
From His lighthouse evermore;
But to us He gives the keeping
Of the lights along the shore.
Let the lower lights be burning,
Send a gleam across the wave;
Some poor fainting struggling seaman,
You may rescue, you may save.

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There is a story behind the song. In a severe storm at night on Lake Erie a passenger-vessel was trying to make the harbor at Cleveland. The lighthouse had been struck by lightning and the ship could not get its direction in the storm. But in the distance the captain could see the little lights at intervals along the breakwater. Although the great beacon-light was out, the captain, watching these little lights closely, was able to bring his ship safely into the harbor. The lower lights had saved his vessel.

There are people today who can't find God. As far as they are concerned He's out. They can't get their bearings from His light.

But to us He gives the keeping
Of the lights along the shore.

Oh Christian, keeper of God's light, who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

V

OLD LOYALTIES AND NEW OCCASIONS

(A SERMON FOR MEMORIAL SUNDAY)

*"But David would not drink of it, but poured it
out to the Lord."*

I CHRON. II:18

MEMORIAL DAY is an anniversary which has gathered significance through the years. It was first observed in 1868 at the suggestion of General John Logan in recognition of soldiers who had fallen in battle on the Union side during the Civil War. Within a few years the wounds of war had healed sufficiently to extend its meaning, and it became by common agreement a memorial for heroes of the Southern army as well. After the Spanish-American War there were new graves of fallen soldiers, and new heroes to honor on this day. Again after the World War, the meaning of the day was widened to include all those who had given their lives for their country. We honor the heroes of battle, and those other heroes, who received no citations for valor, but who gave themselves freely in home or field or office, for others. On Memorial Day we pause and remember. And as we remember, we discover new opportunities opening before us and new duties laying hold on us.

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There is a story related in the Book of Chronicles that strikes a fitting keynote for this anniversary. The Philistines had taken possession of the town where David had lived as a boy, while now his own army lay encamped in a valley beyond a range of hills. David, talking with some of his men, said, "O how I wish I could drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem that is at the gate." Of course he didn't mean that it was very different from any other water. But he knew the village as the scene of all those happy years of boyhood, before he ever heard of the Philistines. He had played there, and camped in the woods, and fished the near-by streams, and come home after a long summer afternoon hot and tired, to drink from that deep, cool well. And now it was all changed, and he was a soldier, and the enemy's garrison was in that town. How he wished it could all be restored and he could drink once more from that well.

His followers heard his chance remark, and that night three men went quietly out into the darkness and slipped through the sentry lines, and made their way to the well, and filled a little earthen pitcher with its water. They came back, not without a scuffle with the Philistine guard, and the next morning they surprised David by telling him that his wish was fulfilled and he could drink. David looked at them and knew that they had risked their lives for him because they loved him and wanted to do everything they could to show it. And David knew the water was too sacred to drink. "God forbid, shall I drink the blood of these men who have risked their lives for me? The water from Bethlehem is the best in the world, but I can't drink it." So he poured it out on the ground as

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an offering to the Lord. And his men loved him all the more, and knew he was a great man.

Now let us look at the little earthen pitcher with its precious water, and see there the symbol of all the privileges and satisfactions that we enjoy, and let us see what lies behind the water, and makes it sacred, too sacred to drink alone by ourselves.

Consider first of all the general liberties of citizenship in a democratic state. The craving for freedom is deep in our nature. We want to express ourselves, to speak our minds, to choose our occupations and our manner of living and our way of worship. We resist any outside compulsion that would thwart this inner longing to be free. Men have lived from time to time under the heel of the tyrant, have been compelled to obey the laws they hated and salute the men they despised, and men are living in just such a restricted state in many quarters of the world today. Oh, how they long for a drink of the sweet waters of liberty, round which an enemy is now encamped, its garrison always standing guard. And it is only a question of time until men will do what they did in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—prize liberty more than life, and break through the lines of the enemy, and shed their blood if need be, that the earthen pitcher with its precious water of freedom may be offered again to the common man.

It is offered to you, and no one can curb your speech or regulate your conduct or prescribe your worship so long as this free expression of yourself does not violate the rights which the state maintains for all. It is yours because men were willing to spend themselves in large

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and generous effort, effort that was dangerous up to the point of death, that you and I might be free. That at least was the soldier's faith. And with all of the horror and folly and futility of war, let us not despise the gallantry of the common man who was told that his country needed him, and left his home, and went out to the battlefield, and died in faith that somehow through what he did his land might be a peaceful place where free and happy people lived.

So above each soldier's grave a hand is outstretched with a little earthen pitcher filled with the precious water of freedom. And when he died the light went out of an old man's eyes, and a young woman felt a sharp stabbing of pain, and the wound healed at last but left its scar. Their hands are joined with his in offering the precious water.

You can take it and go off in a corner and turn your back and drink it by yourself. That's what the man does who takes his citizenship for granted. The man who never votes, who never bothers to write his congressman, who has no interest in social or political questions, who simply rides back and forth on the Lackawanna and finds there a convenient escape from his civic responsibilities at both ends.

Now I know the problem is large and intangible, and it is hard to get hold of it. But every man should know his councilman and mayor, his representatives in Trenton and Washington, and should know where they stand and what they do on public questions. Every man should know the teacher of his children and the principal of the near-by public school, and how well they are qualified and how

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well they are equipped. Every man should know the agencies which he supports in the Welfare Federation, should visit them and become personally acquainted and interested in them. Every man should be familiar with books like *New Frontiers* and *Human Exploitation* and the *Challenge to Liberty* which represent the principles of those points of view now in conflict, should carefully weigh them in the light of experience and in the light of the present situation and future trends, and should presently build up an honest conviction as to where the happiness of the common man can best be found. If you do none of these things, you just take the pitcher from an unseen hand, and drink it down and smack your lips and say, "That's good." You don't deserve it, and there comes a time in the life of a democracy when men who don't deserve their liberties wake up one fine morning to find them gone. God forbid that I should drink this sacred water—this blood of the men who have risked their lives for me. The least I can do is to pour it out in the highest way. They kept faith with their world and we must keep faith with them. They died as soldiers with a dream in their souls, and we must live as citizens to make that dream come true.

Or consider further the satisfactions which have been denied us in these lean depression years. Many a man knows that the enemy's garrison is encamped around that well from which he once drank freely, and for a long while he has been thirsting for that refreshment. And here the word which sums up our deep desire is not liberty, but security. Security against those strange evil forces that might take our employment or our homes,

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that might deny an education for our children and opportunity for young men, that might destroy our savings, until poverty, like a lengthening shadow, follows us in our declining years. We would like to be secure against material want.

Some of us have never been denied that water. And others here and there begin to see the little earthen pitcher extended to them again after it has been long denied. While others, friends and neighbors of yours and mine, still thirst, and their cry goes up, "How long?" And if we are to crown our good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea, there are brothers of yours and mine all over this land, cotton-pickers, and share-croppers, and textile workers, and women and children still in the dust-laden factory air who thirst. It is easy to forget all that, living here in a comfortable suburb with the glory of the springtime all about us. But a broad view that is also honest sees the situations that rise up to rebuke us.

The golf-links lie so near the mill
That almost every day,
The laboring children can look out
And see the men at play.

Now we are in a process that is moving out of all that. We hope it is so. May God grant it. May God grant that we are moving steadily toward the day when a system that has been primarily money conscious becomes man conscious, and everyone who is willing can drink the fresh water of the material necessities of life.

I say I hope we are in that process, and while we watch its development, let us determine our attitude as Christians. We cannot take the comforts and privileges that

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are offered in the little earthen vessel, and drink them down, and say: "Thank God I've got my share. Thank God I am not as other men are." No! God forbid that I should drink the blood and the pain of the man who is at the bottom of the pile just because I happen to be at the top. All that we have in the way of privilege and security is too sacred to use that way. It must be poured out in a mind that will never refuse to see the human facts, however dark and ugly they are, in a heart that beats with compassion for the last and the least in our common social life, in a brave and generous spirit that will not leave the spot where men suffer until their chains are broken and their wounds are healed.

And if the process in which we now find ourselves doesn't end there, then we'll have to take another, for we cannot as Christians go off and drink by ourselves, while our neighbors die of thirst. Who is my neighbor? A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves. And who is my neighbor? We can't get past the fallen traveler who lies by the Jericho road.

Let us think also of the personal blessings which have come to all of us through our parents. And here I address my remarks to all those between sixteen and thirty, the rising generation. Youth has been indicting society in our community, and some of its charges have been to the point. I think you can generally bank on parents to take such charges courteously and patiently, and to answer them as best they can, for parents love their children and want nothing so much as they want them to be happy. Parents also know that true happiness rests on character, and that character is found through discipline, not exter-

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nal compulsion, but the development of a strong set of inner controls. And discipline, as the writer to the Hebrews says, is never pleasant at the time. "It is painful, but to those who are trained by it it afterward yields the peace of character." The peace of character is what parents want for their children. It is the pearl of great price. And many a youth who at sixteen indicts his parents for expecting too much and requiring too much, in later years never ceases to thank God for parents who taught him in a wise and loving way that life was a rigorous business and its stern duties must be met in a high and faithful way. A lad of sixteen is not always the best possible judge of what is good for him. And while parents need to get down to business, and provide wisely and generously for the development of their children, young people also need to come down to earth and show some confidence in their parents' judgment and some respect for their parents' word.

When a lad receives all the wealth of love and devotion of his parents, who have pinched themselves to provide for him, and takes all this as a matter of course, and drinks it down and asks for more, it is time for society to indict him. The lad who spends eight or ten dollars in an evening for food and drink, while his mother stands over a washtub in the cellar and walks a mile to save a trolley fare. The lad who will not take into his confidence his parents, who have poured themselves out for him. He leaves them and runs off and is married, and sends a telegram "just to surprise the old man." Unto whom much is given, of him will much be required. Much is given to boys and girls, all that a heart can give. And if

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you take it, all that the little earthen vessel contains, and go off by yourself and drink it down, you may be twenty-one, but you're not a man, not yet. God forbid—let every true youth say it—God forbid that I should drink the blood of those who have spent their lives for me. I'll use it in the highest way.

Finally, let us consider the benefits which come to us through religion, the influence that sweetens the bitter waters and draws us close to one another, that makes us strong even in our weakness, that kindles hope and purifies our affection, and furnishes the peace of understanding and companionship with God. Truly it would be a thirsty world if all that were denied.

But it is freely offered. Come ye to the waters. The pitcher is filled and placed in your hand. And the hand that offers it is worn with love's labors. And if you look closely you'll see the print of a nail. He founded the Church. She is his new creation. With his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died. All through the years the Church has lived because men and women caught up the theme, echoed the great refrain, pledged themselves heart and hand, and carried high the banner of the Cross. The story of the true Church is the story of love spending itself for Jesus' sake.

Here in this church we have a chapter of the story, a little longer than a hundred years. You see brick and mortar, but look closely and you'll see the devotion and faith of those who built their lives into this church. Listen carefully and their hymns of praise still echo in these walls. Little children were baptized here, and old men bowed their heads and drank the sacred wine and prayed.

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Go back to the beginning, and on moonlight nights, after their day's work, the little company of founders gathered with pick and shovel and worked long and hard, and laid with their own hands the foundations of the church. And the same story is told in that other Church which is now one with us, and these two traditions are one, and it's the same old tradition of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

You come in, and the earthen vessel is offered, full of the water of life, the words of Jesus. Will you take it and drink it by yourself, and leave the empty pitcher, and go your way? God forbid! God forbid that I should drink of the labors and prayers and gifts of those who have spent their lives here. I must take what I find here and use it as an offering to the Lord, and pour out my life here for Jesus' sake.

That's life. To take the pitcher of water, all the satisfactions and privileges that are ours through state and industry and home and church, and to see that the water is sacred, too sacred to drink by ourselves, and to pour it out in a high and useful way, as an offering to the Lord.

VI

THE SUMMONS TO THE HILLS

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills."

PSALM 121:1

THE shrines and altars of religion have usually been found on the hilltop, for religion looks at life from a high perspective, and measures it by its farthest horizons. To see God one must lift his eyes. To find God one must rise above the common level of pain and strife, above the vain show of earthly things, to the higher glory of things eternal.

For the Psalmist the hills were a constant reminder of God. They symbolized the timelessness of God. "Before the mountains were brought forth or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." Their rugged strength suggested the protecting power of God. "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people forever." The soul in distress can "flee as a bird to the mountain." When the heart of man is overwhelmed, from the end of the earth he cries, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I."

We have been looking at the valley in recent years, for that is where we have been living. In the valley we have

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tasted poverty, and afterward discouragement. We have lost confidence in our fellow men, and perhaps they have lost confidence in us. We have become suspicious of our idealism, lest it again play us false. More than one person has let down the bars of personal restraint, and violated principles which he once considered good for all time. This is the time of the devil's harvest, for he is always busy when trouble produces a psychology of escape. Here and there men are losing heart, and when they lose heart they lose everything. That is why I preach on the text, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills."

We can make the words of the Psalmist our own, and say with him, "Our help cometh from the Lord who made heaven and earth." This is not merely the voice of an Oriental poet. It is the universal voice of man speaking through the ages. In that direction lies the real help of the peoples of the earth. There is a sense in which all political history is nothing but the ornamentation of the history of morals. No nation has been able to rise above the impulses of the common people. Kings and lawgivers and generals have swayed their followers hither and thither, and in their day exercised great power, but the destiny of nations has finally been shaped by the morals of the people. The culture of ancient Greece and the empire of ancient Rome could not survive the day when people cared no longer either for learning or for law. If history means anything it means that the greatness of a nation both in extent and duration must always be qualified and finally settled by the goodness of the people.

When we consider what makes people good we must give attention to the claims of religion, for it is the busi-

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ness of religion as it is the business of nothing else to make men and women good. Unhappily, that is not always the result, for, unhappily, everything that goes by the name of religion is not religion. Too often in Western history Christianity has been exploited for political purposes, and both the attempt and the protest are in evidence in Germany today. The pious robe of the monk may hide a greedy nature. The chaplain's prayer may bless the tyrant's sword. A man may attend church quite regularly and be highly respected for that, and while he sits in church he may plan some deviltry in his heart. When we talk about religion, I don't mean the shine on the outside of the cup. By religion I mean that which brings us face to face with God, until the vision of His holiness shames us for our evil ways, until the patience of His love shatters our pride and breaks our hearts with sadness for our wrongs, and then restores our hearts with the joy of the beauty that can dwell within us by His grace. When a nation bends its knees before that God, His help is round about, as the mountains are round about Jerusalem. One of the greatest periods of England's history, considering the existing limitations of knowledge and opportunity, was the period when the people of England were the people of a Book, when preachers were great because of their great themes of justice and mercy and truth, when not only noble and scholar, but farmer and shopkeeper displayed a universal interest in the things that mattered most.

We have more than physical forces to reckon with in the making of our lives. The universe is shot through and through with moral and spiritual meanings, and the

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Psalmist understood that. The man who lifts up his eyes toward God will find help. The hills are round about him to protect him. The deeper forces of the universe are on his side.

The minister of every congregation speaks to people who are tempted. Temptation is the distinguishing mark of a human being. If you haven't any, you belong not in church, but with the angels of heaven. Most of us come here to confess our need before the God who can sweeten the bitter waters of our nature, who can create within us a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within us. The time of temptation comes to us all, but in that time where do we look? Do we fix our eyes upon it for a while and consider its attractions? Then either we are uncommonly well fortified with a strong will or we have not broken the bondage of our besetting weakness. For it is the testimony of those who have overcome evil that they do it not in their own strength, but by lifting their eyes to the hills, from whence cometh their help. Evil has no fascination when the ministering angels draw near. Round about the life that can look up, even though he be far removed from the influence of home and friends, is the help of God as the mountains are round about Jerusalem.

We are familiar with the dangers that beset the home. It is not the attraction of the outside world that breaks up a home. It is rather the disappearance of patience and understanding and forgiveness, until all beauty is gone, and everything sacred about family life has become common and monotonous. Then of course the outside world becomes inviting and its pleasures become an escape from

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a dull and empty place, a place that might have been the brightest spot on earth. But where the father and mother can lift up their eyes together, and see the higher meaning of their comradeship, and pray for grace and gentleness, and for eyes that see the deeper glory of the commonplace, and for a love for each other as new as every sunrise and as bright and pure as the light of the stars, then round about that home is the help of God as the mountains are round about Jerusalem.

I wish it were in my power to give every unemployed man who has come to me this year a job. I wish it were in my power to put new shoes on tired feet, and new clean clothes on worn-out bodies. But those are not your needs, nor in the final reckoning theirs. For food and clothes are not enough as long as the life is more than meat and the body than raiment. What man really wants is the kind of joy that echoes endlessly within the inner chamber of his soul. No man can give that to you or me. But the Psalmist tells us who can. I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills. From whence cometh my help? My help cometh from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

There is another meaning in the hills which are round about us. They are not only messengers of help, but messengers of duty. Religion is a protection for the soul of man, and religion is also a challenge. When we lift our eyes to the hills they beckon us. The only way out of a valley is by climbing a hill, and climbing means effort. The only way out of a depression, whether it be psychological or economic, is by hard work. Instead of praying for an easy way, it would be better to pray that God would save us from even looking for an easy way. It

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isn't there. The easy job is a thing of the past. Making a living for most of us will mean hard work for the rest of our lives. Those who live through it will be those who can climb hills. But the towering and difficult hills which are all about us suggest thrilling possibilities for men and women of high spirits. Here again are the crises when great souls are born. Here is the hammering on the anvil that welds the tempered steel. Here is the purging fire that burns out the dross and refines the precious gold. Here is the threshing-floor and the sifting of grain from chaff. Here is the steep ascent, the despair of all who are soft, the joy of all who are brave. Every pilgrim in his progress finds the valley of humiliation, and beyond it the hill difficulty, which is the only way out. And never was duty more faithfully discharged, nor character more nobly revealed, than when a certain steep and lonely hill was crowned with the glory of a cross.

I do not know what special hills may stand in your way today. Some of you may have the care of relatives placed squarely upon you as your responsibility. You may have carried that burden for some time, and the end is not in sight. Because of it you do not have the same freedom or privilege that you might enjoy if all that you earned were yours alone. You have been laboring up that hill, at times despairing, for the way was steep. But lift up your eyes and see that hill as the duty which God appoints, the pathway shining brightly in His light, and every step of the way there dawns the deeper realization that this is life, to spend and be spent, and there is no other life so worthy or so glad. The hope of mankind today is in such people, men and women who once had

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sufficient and now have nothing, and who are climbing bravely up the hill, singing as they go.

Others find the way steep because they are not as strong in body, not as young, as they once were. And others are dismayed because they must climb alone. The comrade who means so much is no longer by their side. If only that one were near, no trial would be too great, no burden too heavy. But no one of us is really alone. If the sympathy that we feel for one another is inarticulate, if it cannot be felt in the inner chamber of your spirit, there is One who can speak to you, One who walks by your side, who bears in his strength your burden, and speaks his promise of the Father's home.

A noble army, men and boys,
The matron and the maid,
Around the Saviour's throne rejoice,
In robes of light arrayed:
They climbed the steep ascent of heaven
Through peril, toil, and pain.
O God, to us may grace be given
To follow in their train.

In the hills is the promise of help and the summons to duty. And in the hills is the inspiration for all our striving as Christians. To inspire means literally to "breathe into." The hills do that to us. They give us our breath, and breath is what keeps us going.

"What's the use of it all?" A generation of sad young men asks that question. "What's the point of living? It's all uphill, with no arriving. You get old, and sick, and die, and a preacher says a prayer over you, and it's the end. People know that, but they won't admit it. Death is the end no matter what the preacher says. I'm not going to

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waste my life on this Kingdom of Heaven stuff. I'm going to live my own life the way I please, and have what fun I can, and when I can't get a thrill out of life, I'll quit."

I have no word of censure for you if that be your outlook, for I know what produced it. You have lived in a time when life was cheap; when thousands of young men were butchered like cattle on a battlefield; when the world's weath was poured out like water; when religion was dragged into the conflict and discredited by the cruelty it sanctified. You are living in a time when men are hungry in the midst of plenty, when hundreds of them sleep in shacks like nomads, while carpenters who might have built them homes are standing in line for bread. You are living in a time when the crook and the gangster find justification in the gentlemen looters who have condemned old men and women to beggary and a pauper's grave. You are living in a time when a poor man who steals a dollar must go to jail, while a rich man who steals millions isn't even brought to trial. You are living in a time when fiction in its passion for what is called realism can't get above the urges that are either economic or erotic. You are living in all that, and through all that, and if you are out of breath and want to quit I have no word of censure for you.

But before you quit, come with me and lift up your eyes toward the hills. From the hills comes the echo of the great "Te Deum." The glorious company of the apostles, the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the noble army of martyrs. And these are not all. For everyone who has lived bravely and well, whose life has been dedicated to the proposition that there is a spirit in man, lifts

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his voice in the mighty chorus. I would have you look long and well at the great masters of poetry and prose, at the rich treasures of art and architecture. I would have you wait until your soul tingled with the music of a great symphony. I would have you meditate on the power and range of the philosopher's mind, until the lost wonder of your soul was restored and you could marvel at the nobility in man. If all these failed to stir your spirit, I would leave you at the foot of Calvary, beneath the Cross of Jesus, until you beheld the glory of the light that makes that shadow fall.

If there is no inspiration there, no breath, no quickening of your higher self, and you must quit, then you must quit. But you must also understand why you quit. It is not because this kind of world can't measure up to you. It is because you can't measure up to this kind of world.

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills. There lies my help, the silent sentinels of God. There sounds the trumpet call of duty, the pathway shining in His light. There is the glory that inspires, the breath that keeps my soul alive.

VII

LOST IN THE CROWD

"The man who had been cured did not know who it was; for Jesus had gone out unnoticed, there being a crowd in the place."

JOHN 5:13 (WEYMOUTH)

You remember the story of the impotent man who was healed at the pool of Bethesda. That pool had mysterious powers, and at certain times when an angel disturbed its waters, the first one to dip in the pool was made well of his infirmity. Jesus found a man who had been a cripple nearly forty years, waiting for his turn to be healed. The Master had compassion on him and told him that if he had faith, he could rise up and walk that very hour. When he picked up the mat and started to walk around as well as anyone, the crowd gathered, for this was sensational. The Pharisees objected because he was carrying his bed on the Sabbath. He didn't care what day it was as long as he could walk. "If you want to know more about it," he said, "ask the man who helped me." But when they looked around they could not find him, for Jesus had gone out unnoticed, there being a crowd in the place.

This is a parable for modern life, and we might call it *The fate of true religion in the overcrowded life*. It is especially relevant as we approach the Christmas holi-

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days. Holiday comes from holy day, but there is precious little of the holy left in it. It is a time for shopping, for gaiety, for parties, for the interchange of trinkets, and in the haste and fatigue of celebrating Christmas the most forgotten man is the man Jesus Christ. He goes out of our lives unnoticed, there being a crowd in the place. But the Christmas season is only a striking example of a condition that prevails throughout the year, and it is the general condition of being overcrowded about which we are to think this morning.

At the outset I wish to be quite clear as to what is meant by the overcrowded life. It is commonly said that we are all too busy today. That is not entirely true. To be busy means to be hard at work, and there are at least eleven million men who are not too busy in that sense today. If you yourself are busy, you can thank God for that. It is good to be busy not only because of what you accomplish outwardly, but because of what you accomplish inwardly. When you are hard at work you can keep your mind off yourself, and nobody can think about himself continually without breaking under the strain. When we are busy about a few important things life is full and satisfying. But our trouble begins when we have passed the saturation point. Then because we are too busy about too many things, life is overcrowded and unsatisfying.

Perhaps the simplest illustration is in the matter of diet. How shall a person be fed? By a few important foods, properly balanced, properly cooked and properly eaten. But the trouble begins when the human stomach is overcrowded with too much that will not mix. There is the origin of the expression "fed up," and nine out of

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ten people who are fed up with modern existence are in that condition because they live an overcrowded life.

There is no better example of the right kind of a busy life than the life of the Master. Every hour of his ministry was packed full, but always with a few important things. "I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day. He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." That was all, and there wasn't a day in his life when he wasn't doing that. On one occasion he was too busy to eat. On that occasion he was straightening out a disordered life. One evening he was too busy to come home. That evening he was explaining to a few people how they might find abundant life. One night he was too busy to sleep. That night he was on the hilltop, on his knees in prayer. Busy—but nowhere do you find him confused about what to do next, or in breathless haste to save time. In the economy of God, the important duties of life never conflict. The conflict comes when they are carelessly mixed with unimportant matters, until we can't tell the great from the small. The overcrowded life is not the life that is too busy, but the life that is too busy about too many things.

This morning I venture to propose a balanced diet for the inner life of man. I emphasize the inner life because that is the main concern of religion. Unless that gets its normal nourishment and enjoys its normal development, our satisfaction with life is bound to diminish.

First of all we must make room for work, eight hours

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of it, at least five days in the week. Work is not a necessary evil. It is a necessary blessing. If a man can't get work that pays, he ought to find work that doesn't pay. That may sound like heresy, but I believe it to be a sound rule. I don't mean that a man should offer to stand behind a counter or run errands or paint somebody's house without compensation. That would lower the standard of the workman everywhere. But he should put in those eight hours in productive effort. It may not produce dollars, but it produces something more important than dollars in him. It keeps alive his dignity and self-respect, and saves him from getting flabby through too much idleness. Let him spend half that time in a library. If he never had a college education, here is his chance. If he had it, the principal thing he learned was how much he didn't know. I am continually amazed with the way in which many a man, working long hours, still has time to keep his mind fresh with well-seasoned literature, and many a man with nothing to do can't even sweep his front steps.

If, on the other hand, you don't have employment because you don't need it, then it is equally important that you also justify your privilege by showing your usefulness. To be rich and idle, to live like a parasite on the fruits of another's toil, to continually take and not return, in this day above all others is, I think, to be damned. For the true measure of life today is not what a man is doing in the world, but what he is doing for the world.

If you have work, whether in office or store or home, then see it always in terms of your God-given purpose. And such a purpose is not always a grand and notable

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career. It may be very humble and obscure, but it is still of God. Somebody must plow the field and harvest the wheat. Somebody must grind the meal and bake the bread. Somebody must wrap it up behind a counter and put it under your arm, if you are ever to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." Everyone that helped answer that prayer is fulfilling the high calling of God. Your life may never be like the lofty summit of a mountain seen from afar, flashing in the sunlight. You may be like the valley that nestles half-hidden in its shadow. But you can cultivate a beauty that the mountain never knows—a refreshing coolness in the summer evening, where flowers bloom, and the grass is rich and green, and the birds of the air build their nests and sing. If you live in obscurity, remember that God who made the hills made also the valleys, and the glory of one is equal to the glory of the other in His sight. Whatever you do, do it as unto the Lord, that each morning may bring you to your feet with the eager cry, "I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day."

Next to work, I put play in the balanced life. Recreation—re-creation—the building up again of our ideal energies. Two balanced processes are taking place continually in our bodies. Nature is continually wearing us away and nature is continually building us up. Old things are passing away, all things are becoming new. Every particle in your body is subject to replacement, and you have an entirely new body every seven years. Old age brings weariness only because the forces that rebuild can't keep up with the forces that wear away.

The same principle holds good for the spirit in man.

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It is spent in labor. It is restored, recreated in play. Thus all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. We can put it another way and declare it to be a rule that you can work effectively just as long as you have the surplus energy which is furnished by play. It is that margin of surplus energy that determines whether we shall be happy in our work or not. It determines whether we shall be ahead of our work, with energy to spare, or behind our work, with weariness overtaking us each day before the day is done.

"Come ye apart and rest awhile," said Jesus to his disciples. They were using up their reserve energy. They had been busy night and day with the multitude. They were carried away with enthusiasm. They didn't need sleep or play. But he knew better. He sensed the kind of power within them, and because it was nervous energy and not normal energy, he said, "Come ye apart and rest awhile."

An old Egyptian proverb suggests the balance between work and play: "The marksman hitteth the target partly by pulling, partly by letting go. The boatsman reacheth the landing partly by pulling, partly by letting go." There is recreation in good literature, in art and drama, in music that relieves the strains and tensions so characteristic of an age that lives in haste. The Sabbath was God's wise provision for the relief of human weariness. From the beginning it was meant to be a bounty and not a burden for the life of man. And I know of no higher and holier use of some of its hours than the wholesome recreation that restores the normal energy of body and mind.

Next to play I put love in its noblest and purest sense.

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The love that binds husband and wife, and parent and child. The Christian love of friend for friend. Here is the affectionate side of a person's nature, the link between man and his fellow man, and life is never complete without it. It is not good for man to live alone. Not good because his thinking needs the balance and correction of the thought of others. Not good because his burdens need the help of another lest he falter beneath the load. Not good because his joys must become the joys of others before they are ever complete. Not good because his feeling for his fellow man is a primary feeling, and unless it is expressed in its highest ways of loyalty and comradeship, it will force its own expression in lower ways.

Nine-tenths of our social evil is not the conscious pursuit of evil for its own sake. It is the breaking loose of the deep craving for companionship, stopped in all its normal expressions, but determined to carve its own channels, and expressing itself just as madly as it has been long repressed. You can't begin to heal the social sins of a great city with its hordes of lonely people by a system of laws and jails. You start the healing process when you give them what has been denied—the normal associations of family life, the respect and confidence of friends.

Here are three children now in mature life, two sons and a daughter. Each has an honorable record and a bright future, one in religion, one in education, and one in business. Each participates largely in life and contributes largely to life. And the father, an old man, sits in his library and fingers again with fond memory the pages of the books that he read them every evening after supper in the hour before they went to sleep. When we who are

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parents are too busy for that, then we are too busy. While others cry loudly for a broader life, I would like to put in a word for a deeper life. A life where love, which is our deepest human instinct, finds its normal expression in the simple satisfactions of home and the circle of true friends.

And finally above work and play and love I put worship. Both the solitary worship of the man alone with God with the door closed and the world shut out, and the corporate worship of the congregation who gather in the house of the Lord.

From every stormy wind that blows,
From every swelling tide of woes;
There is a calm, a sure retreat,
'Tis found beneath the mercy-seat.

That has been crowded out of the experience of a multitude of professing Christians today. We wonder why life is so strange, so full of struggle and conflict, why it doesn't always seem good. It wasn't meant to be good without God in the center of it. If God can't teach us by the light of His presence, then His message is hidden in our adversity, and the husks that we eat are reminders of the bread that was meant for us.

This generation is not primarily atheistic. If put to the test it would choose belief rather than unbelief. It is not primarily evil. If put to the test it would prefer good to evil. It is simply overcrowded. The lesser things have preempted the central place of the greater things. And worship has slipped out unnoticed, there being a crowd in the place.

Work, play, love, and worship. You work hard enough.

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But you leave out play, and neglect family and friends, and you worship on the run. What else do you do? You serve on committees where minutes are kept and hours are wasted. You attend meetings and pass resolutions and listen to empty talk. Your engagement books are cluttered with lesser duties where precious hours will be spent in vain. Perhaps the arch-offender, if I were to name him, would be the average minister of today. He is a kind of hack speaker for every meeting that comes down the road. He says the blessing at all kinds of dinners where lay people ought to say it themselves. He is a modern edition of the town crier, and the more he shouts the less he has to say. I am beginning to see why no church wants a man past fifty. His body is weary. His mind is dull and empty. He hasn't worked too hard. He has worked at too many things. He has buttered the bread too thin.

Dr. Jowett, the great pastor of the Fifth Avenue Church, rarely spoke at public gatherings outside his own pulpit. His ministry to the city and to the nation was in that one place. He was alone in his study long enough in thought and prayer, to bring his people a message week after week that burned with divine fire. If they wanted to hear him, they could hear him there. Now I respect this community and intend to serve it all I can. But I intend to put first things first. I have more than I can do to bring you where I want to bring you each Sabbath, into the presence of God. I have more than I can do to know you one by one, both members and strangers, and let you know that whatever of joy or trouble, of success or failure, of glory or shame, may be your lot, I am by your side. I cannot even attend all of your meetings and still serve

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the major interests of this church. I believe I shall serve this community best by trying to be your shepherd and your friend, while God gives us the joy of life together.

Work, play, love, worship. If you work hard, and play happily, and love sincerely, and worship humbly, you live well. Anything that interferes with that you would better cut out, lest the greater joys of life be lost. Lest the Son of Man be the forgotten man in your life, who goes out unnoticed, there being a crowd in the place.

VIII

BARGAINS GOOD AND BAD

"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

MARK 8:36

THESE words were spoken by the Master with considerable feeling. He had just revealed to his disciples his decision to go up to Jerusalem, and he made plain the consequences of his choice. He supposed they were sufficiently advanced in their appreciation of his work to understand why he must suffer many things, and be rejected, and at last give up his life on a cross. Peter, calling him aside, insisted that it was unnecessary, and pointed to an easier way. His reply was unusually severe: "Get thee behind me Satan; you think like a man and not like God."

The disciple's suggestion brought back all the memories of an earlier crisis in his life. The devil had taken him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them, and had said, "All these things will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me." The devil thought he knew his man, and he bid high, but not high enough. The answer came back swiftly, "Get thee behind me Satan, for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and

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him only shalt thou serve." The devil left him, and the Master, exhausted but triumphant, waited for ministering angels. He had been offered the whole world for his soul, and his answer was "No."

The temptation which he met at the threshold of his ministry, he now met again toward the end, and he met it in the same way. Then followed this question, accompanied, of course, with feeling, for it represented the deepest issue he had ever faced, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

Profit and loss are familiar words, not only today, but all through human history. Man has always been giving and receiving, and gaining or losing by his deal. Abraham and Lot entered into an agreement whereby Lot chose the fertile fields around the Jordan and pitched his tent toward Sodom, while Abraham chose the lonely rugged hills and built an altar, where he worshiped God. Esau came in from the fields hungry and tired, and the crafty Jacob traded a dish of pottage, steaming and appetizing and immediately satisfying, for the birthright, which in that moment of hunger seemed a far-off good. Judas traded some information—nobody knows just what it was—in fact, in nearly two thousand years of Christian thought nobody raised the question until Albert Schweitzer asked what it was that Judas betrayed. Certainly it was not the location of Jesus, for he was daily in the temple, and with their elaborate spy system the authorities could have arrested him at any time. But some incriminating evidence, perhaps the Messianic secret, was traded by Judas for thirty pieces of silver.

You and I live in a section of land that was bought

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by a group of Presbyterians who came down from Connecticut and settled at Newark for the purpose of worshiping God in their own way. The Indians gave them the land all the way from the Hudson River to the second Orange mountain for a few kegs of rum, several muskets, and some rounds of ammunition, worth less than twenty-five dollars today. Profit and loss—the history of man is in large measure a history of man's trades, his bargains good and bad.

Life itself is a great transaction. People are forever giving and receiving, and gaining or losing in the bargains that they make. The secret of successful living is thus the secret of successful trading. It is to know the worth of things. Here is a man who admits honestly that he wants riches. He might have been a poet or a musician, but he trades in whatever talents he may have in that direction for the work that pays best. "I don't want money," he says, "merely for the satisfaction of hoarding and counting and storing it up. I want it for what it does. It means a home, and education for my children, and travel and entertainment, and comfort in my latter years."

That is perhaps the simplest explanation of the widespread craving for riches. But it is easy to show that wealth is not enough. Mark Hopkins once put this question to his class: "You would like to have the world, as much of it, at least, as you want. Would you be willing to have all that you want and be deaf? Perhaps you would. Would you be willing to have all that you want and be deaf and dumb? Probably not. Would you like to have all that you want in the world, and be deaf, dumb and

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blind? Certainly not." For what doth it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his faculties? There isn't a person here who would trade places with a very wealthy man, if that man were past ninety. For what would it profit a man to have all of those millions, if those many years were heaped up on his back?

When a person sacrifices his strength for profit, when he refuses the leisure and recreation which are investments in health, and spends his precious reserves of energy for riches, and ends up in a sanitarium, he has made a bad bargain with life. For what shall it profit a man to gain a fortune and lose his health?

Thus far we have been reasoning about comparative values on an ordinary human level. But at this point there is injected into our thinking the Master's appraisal of the worth of a man's soul. To him the well-being of the body, important as it was, was secondary to the well-being of the soul. "Therefore, if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off and cast them from thee; it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee; it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire." Never mind about the fire, whether it be the old-fashioned hell, or the flames of remorse, or simply the annihilation of a soul which, having been sinned against, is finally sinned away and cannot survive the shock of death. The important truth is that the possession of a soul is a costly matter. It is worth so much that unlimited riches with the power and opportunity they afford, and health and strength with

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the satisfactions they assure, can be put together on one side of the balance, and the soul on the other, and the soul outweighs them all.

An old Egyptian monarch is unearthed, surrounded with treasures, his body preserved against decay. And what does it all profit when life is gone? We call that death, but Jesus called it sleep. What Jesus called death was the death of the soul, used up in material cravings and physical sensations, dead to duty and honor and justice and love, no longer seeing the glory of God or hearing His whisper, a spiritual mummy that can't open its eyes to the stars, or feel the wind that sweeps in from the sea.

When that has been traded in for wealth and power, man has made a bad bargain with life. For what shall it profit mankind to gain the whole world of knowledge and science and invention, and lose the justice and the mercy, the goodwill and the love of peace, which are the high marks of the soul? Here is the paradox of our times: man wiser than he has ever been before, surrounded with all of the inventions of his genius, yet for some unaccountable reason, hungry and ragged, with hate and despair in his eyes. For some unaccountable reason, did we say? The Master could account for it! *This generation has traded in its soul.* The devil has taken it to an exceeding high mountain, and has showed it all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, and has said, "All these things are yours if you will sign on my dotted line."

That dotted line! Did we read before we signed? Seek ye first the things of this world, and use your religion to sanctify your aims. Take your profits out of the under-

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ling, and ease your conscience by helping the charities. Always be courteous to Jesus, but don't take him seriously. He lived a beautiful life, but he was divine and you are human. It is always proper to approve him, but always impractical to follow him. Religion makes a very nice-looking flag, but religion will never do as a rudder. Are you ready to sign? And the world signed, and you and I are part of this world, and God forgive us, not very different from it. We signed on the dotted line, and treaties were scraps of paper, and contracts were made to be broken when inconvenient, and conferences came to naught, and the young men were slaughtered, and the old men lost their jobs. It was a bad bargain that we made with life. Ah yes, there is feeling in those words when they are spoken in some high heaven today, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

Let us put it another way, and perhaps the younger people can understand it better. Among those who play tennis there are amateurs and there are professionals. If a man is a very fine player, he may be tempted by an offer to turn professional. Let us say he is offered a certain sum plus a percentage of the gate receipts. "What will it profit me," he says, "to gain this sum of money and lose my amateur standing?" There are some who trade at a lower price, and some who trade higher, and some who will not trade at all.

So in the matter of spiritual standing there are amateurs and there are professionals. Every man is tempted, from time to time, to turn professional, to trade in his idealism for some immediate pleasure or gain. There are

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some who trade at a low price, and some at a high price. It is the devil's theory that everyone can be bought. All who are pessimistic about human nature, all who interpret the loftiest and bravest deeds in terms of the lowest motives, all who believe that, given the time and the place and the proper inducement, everyone can be bought, are persuaded that the devil is right. They point to a certain person who lives happily and comfortably and enjoys a reputation for good works. "Do you see this man? He never wants for the good things of life. He has never walked the pavements looking for a job. He has never known sorrow or tragedy. It is easy for him to sit there in church and be a Christian. But take away everything that he has and his religion will come tumbling down, like a stack of cards."

How modern is the devil in the book of Job! "Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face." God gave him leave, and the devil did his worst. And Job, poor and sorrowful, and broken in body, rent his mantle and shaved his head and fell down upon the ground and worshiped, and said, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." The devil was wrong.

The devil was wrong when he stood on a high mountain with the Nazarene. Together they surveyed the kingdoms of the world, north and south and east and west. It was a marvelous sight, and the man who stood there was trem-

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bling. He was tired and hungry. It was the time and the place for the devil to make his highest bid, and he made it. But it was thrown back in his face by a man who prized above all else his soul.

Please God the devil is still wrong. It is the conviction of all who see any hope for man and his institutions, that there are still in this world some people who can't be bought. You can take their goods, their health, their joys, their attainments, but you cannot take their integrity, and though they go naked and wounded through blood and tears, their souls go marching on. Whatever happens, they will keep their standing before the Lord.

In the light of recent years, face to face as we are with the most serious predicament that man has ever known, I think you will agree that the hope of humanity rests with them. They are the saving leaven, and through their influence this world may still be a decent and tolerable place in which to live.

In closing, let us consider two personal bargains that we must make with life. Hunger and love are probably our deepest instincts, and life turns around these two foci, a man's business and his home. What kind of a trade have you made in your work? You give your strength, your mind, your years. Do you also give your soul? Do you make headway by crushing some one else? Do you drive your men like Pharaoh's slaves that you may drink and dress like Pharaoh?

I don't know what kind of bargains you have made. I only know that if you can be just and honorable in your work, and if the effect of it is to enrich and not impoverish

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your fellow men, you have made a good bargain. God bless you. But if, because of what you are and what you do, some one is deceived or injured, some heart is broken, some eyes are filled with tears at the mention of your name, then you can sneak out here and live comfortably and respectably in the suburbs, but before God you've made a miserable trade with your life.

A man's work is a transaction, and so also is his home. Near this church is a family in a little apartment over a store. The eldest of four daughters brought home a high-school report-card, with an A grade in every subject. (You can be sure there is something fundamentally right about that home.) A Sunday-school teacher happened to call as the family was sitting down at the supper table. Supper that evening was a dish of stewed tomatoes for each one. The father has been out of work a long while, and the children are neither adequately dressed nor properly fed. Presently, in the conversation with the visitor, the father said, "One thing we have in this home is love." The mother looked at him proudly, and turned to the caller and said, "You know I have a wonderful husband."

One thing we have in this home is love! And what doth it profit a family to gain a beautiful dwelling, with all of the contrivances for comfort, and all of the ornamentation that money can buy, and lose the love which is the soul of the home?

I leave you on the mountain-top with all the kingdoms of the earth spread beneath your feet. I leave you not with the tempter, but with the Son of Man. He looks awhile on the show and splendor of earthly things, and

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you follow his eyes. He then looks upward at the glory of a heavenly kingdom, and again you follow his eyes. And then he looks at you. "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul, his standing in the Kingdom that is to come?"

IX

WHO WILL BETRAY HIM?

"And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me. And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, Is it I?"

MARK 14:18-19

As THEY were sitting at the table in the upper room, he declared that one of them would soon be disloyal to him. There was already some sadness mingled with their joy, for they knew it was the last time that they would be together. But when he announced that a traitor was among them, they were exceeding sorrowful, and began to say one by one, "Is it I?"

Betrayal was a dreadful thing where loyalty was everything. The more remarkable that each should have suspected himself. Suppose I had knowledge that some one here today had carefully planned some evil for this very night. And I said to you, I know some one here will do this awful deed. At once there would be a protest. "No! No! We are all good people. We would never do that." Or some might say to themselves: "I think I know whom he means. I wouldn't put that past him." While others might draw themselves instinctively away from the one who sits next them, lest he be the one who planned this

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evil in his heart. But the disciples were different. They began to say one by one, "Is it I?"

What was the matter with these men? Where was their confidence, their self-respect. Didn't they have any backbone? Let us think about this matter for a little while. Perhaps we shall discover that these honest humble words, "Is it I?" are more becoming for the Christian, more certainly a proof of his inward strength and integrity than the high-sounding promise and the pious boast.

For three years they had been close to the greatest teacher of all time, and they had learned a few things well. In the first place, they saw clearly the finer distinctions between good and evil. A trained ear detects a discordant note in a combination of musical sounds, just because the ear is sensitive to perfect harmony. So with the eye of an artist as he looks at a painting for the first time, and the mind of a scholar as he examines a new book. So with the spirit trained to see the heavenly vision of the life of man. Here was the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven as a bride adorned for her husband, and over against it was just plain Jerusalem, with its Pharisees and its publicans, its beggars and its harlots, its smug religious folk and its outcasts who found life miserable and mean. The disciples saw the same city that everyone else saw, but they saw it in a different way, for they had been trained to see and to yearn and to labor for the fulfillment of the perfect plan. Theirs was a higher standard, more searching in its inward testing, more saving in its outward reach.

They had always known that it was a crime to beat and rob a traveler on a lonely road. But now they knew

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that it was an even greater wrong to pass him by. They had always known that it was wrong to run off to a far-away country and waste one's substance in riotous living. But now they knew it was an even greater wrong to look with cold, unpitying eye on the prodigal's return. They had always known that there were sins of the flesh that were clearly wrong. But now they knew it was far more dreadful for a man to level the accusing finger when the same sins were in his heart.

They had learned that the greatest of all was not lord but servant of all, that he has most who loves most, that the glory of life is not to gain, but to spend and be spent. They had learned how many perfectly natural impulses which were not only accepted but commended by society were actually hindrances to the coming of Christ's Kingdom, in which man makes his neighbor's good his chief concern. In a society that was running one mile they were compelled to run two. It was a faster pace. They were measured by a new measure that went deeper into the heart, and farther into the common life of man. Their righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees if they were to see the Kingdom.

Often they were slow in understanding his words, still slower in doing them, but in time they learned. If he required only that they love their friends and hate their enemies, fast twice a week, and not break the Sabbath, and bring their tithe to the altar, they might have promised that. But this higher way of loving one's enemies, answering a curse with a blessing, seeking the Kingdom first in a great venture of faith—well, the instincts were strong within them, and society with its untrained ear would

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miss the discordant note and call them good, even when they betrayed him in subtle ways. All this they knew, and so said one after another, "Is it I?"

Even Judas may have been a man of good intentions. Intensely patriotic, drawn to Jesus because he saw in him the natural leader of the people, hoping that he would presently take the sword and rally his followers, impatient at the delay, believing that if the issue were drawn sharply, and he were forced to act, he would lead the rebellion and set the people free. Perhaps he whispered in his ear as he betrayed him with a kiss, "Now is the time." One disciple thought so and seized a sword, but Jesus bade him put it up, and went along. And Judas, realizing how utterly he had missed the deep intent of Jesus, and how enormous and dreadful his wrong had been, went out into the night and hanged himself.

When we see how subtle a thing betrayal is, how easy it is to do it and pass for good, rather than boast of our virtue, is it not more becoming for everyone of us to say, "Is it I?"

Take for example this matter of war. We are continually reminded in the daily press of the new strategy and technique of war. It will be done largely in the air, with the chemist and bacteriologist supplying the gases and the germs that wipe out whole areas of helpless civilians. That is the picture, and it is no fool's picture, for just as the last war was more horrible and deadly than anything that had gone before, so the next will put to its evil uses every advanced method for quick and wholesale slaughter. Men who can fly airplanes can accomplish a worse desolation than the dark ages ever knew. That is the picture that

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we see, and we see nations engaged in the armament race which has always sooner or later precipitated open warfare. So it is very easy for the average man to say, "In a few years we'll have another war." It is just as inevitable, just as necessary in his mind, as the next slide of rock at Niagara, and he is just as certain that nothing can be done about it. Humanity is in the grip of mighty forces that cannot be resisted, forces that are sweeping the nations to destruction, and no power in heaven or on earth can set man free. What a dark and terrible indictment of God and man and nature, to say that anything so black and shameful must of necessity occur!

Yet it is said over and over again by the man on the street as sober truth: "War is necessary. It must always be." Is not this the subtle betrayal into which the Christian so easily slips? The Christian who has seen a higher vision, who declares his faith in a Providence that shapes our ends, in a power that can change the human heart and lift man to a higher level, in a Saviour whose will for mankind is the way of righteousness and peace, all this richness of understanding and hope and conviction he betrays when he says so carelessly, "Yes, war must always be." My friends, the only thing that can make it absolutely necessary is the widespread notion that it is absolutely necessary. And those who say so are helping the evil cause, are leading the men with torches and lanterns who would hurry the Saviour off to a cross. You can say it and pass for good, but be careful lest as a Christian you betray the Son of Man.

So with every great social evil that impoverishes the life of man. Depression, unemployment, bread lines, polit-

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ical corruption, crime—to these things we have been accustomed, and by these things we have been hardened, and it is easy to say with the man on the street: "There is nothing to be done. These things must always be." There is our modern betrayal. To refuse to rebel against the iniquity that man has made. To see the world in chains and to deny that Christ can set men free. To see the world hungry and to deny the living bread. We can all be so very good and still betray the heavenly vision, that we cannot boast of virtue. Far more becoming is the question, "Is it I?"

The disciples were trained in the finer distinctions of good and evil. Moreover they had learned to be honest with their own faults. After all his instruction about humility, they had quarreled about who should be greatest. After his words about faith, they had cried out on the storm-tossed boat, their eyes wide with terror. After his teaching about forgiveness, they had threatened to call down fire from heaven upon their enemies. After his quiet words about the Cross, they had pleaded with him to choose an easier way. They remembered their many failings, and when he talked about the impending betrayal, they began not to protest, but to search their hearts with the question, "Is it I?"

Now the recitation of these faults might lead us to think that they were soft and unreliable. But not so. They were average ordinary men in all respects save one. They were only extraordinary in that they were honest with themselves. Jesus had taught them that. He found them examining the mote in their brother's eye, and looking past the beam in their own eye. He found them condemn-

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ing the sins of others most severely which they hated most in themselves. In his book, *Psychology and Morals*, J. A. Hadfield says, "It is literally true that in judging others, we trumpet abroad our secret faults. . . . Allow any man to give free vent to his feelings about others, and then you may with perfect safety turn and say, Thou art the man."

Judge not that ye be not judged, for you are measured by the very measure that you use. Quietly and patiently he taught them not to dwell on another's faults, but to examine their own hearts; to know how capable they were of the sins of every man, that they might be slow to speak and swift to hear, kind and generous in their appraisal of others, and strict in the accounting of their own ways.

For a little virtue is a dangerous thing. It sends the Pharisee into the temple with the empty prayer, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are." He was not righteous but self-righteous. The righteous prayer came from the heart of the publican who would not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." This man went down to his house justified, for his was the honest prayer.

What is the Christian attitude today toward the men in high places who have been found out? We do not condone their actions nor make light of their wrongs. But let every man put himself in their position, with their training, their environment, their temptations, and instead of wasting his breath in condemnation, let him say, "Is it I?" What is the Christian attitude toward the man at

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the bottom of the heap, the beggar, the tramp, the outcast? Let every man put himself in their position, with their environment, their home life, their temptations, and instead of leveling a scornful finger, let him say softly, "Is it I?"

What is the Christian attitude toward the shortcomings and evils of the world at large, where happiness is denied to many, and life seems cheap, and hearts are broken? The easier way is to condemn the system. The truer, and the harder, and the more saving way is to go into one's closet, and shut the door, and pray quietly, and say, "Is it I?"

The system is undeniably ripe for a change. But in the long run our future turns not on man-made systems but on men. You cannot build a just and equitable and merciful system out of dishonest and selfish men. The system is bad enough, and we shall not condone it, but if we deal with causes and not with symptoms, we reach finally the heart of man. Something is ailing there, and we have a spiritual problem at the bottom of this whole depression, and not a problem of capital and goods. And nothing will be settled right until man gets down in the second place where he belongs, and puts God first, and makes his neighbor's good his own. The meek and no one else will inherit the earth. The exercise of all our brains and the operation of all our machinery will avail little unless we see the beckoning hand and hear the voice that says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." One day, please God, the world will listen to those words. And publicans will pray, "God be merciful to me a sinner." And disciples, searching their hearts honestly will say, "Is it I?"

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They were trained in the finer distinctions of good and evil. They had learned to be honest with their own faults. And finally, they knew how to use a temptation when it came. In times of danger, some people are panic-stricken, unable to move or speak for fear. Others immediately swing into almost superhuman action, every nerve and impulse quickened by the crisis. A large airedale dog in our neighborhood fell on a little terrier which was a children's pet, and the terrier was having a bad time. A little girl ran into the house to tell her mother, but in her fright she could not speak. A little boy, smaller than the airedale, seized a club and began to pound him with might and main.

Temptation is a time of danger. And happy are those who have learned to meet it with every finer impulse quickened, that they may use it in the highest way. The possibility of betrayal was there, clearly stated in the words of Jesus. And had these men exclaimed: "How dreadful! It must be some one else. Away with him," running as it were away from the very sight of evil, they would have been no stronger for this experience. Indeed they might have yielded when the danger came their way.

But when they began to say with one accord, "Is it I?" we see them going into action. "The possibility is in me. Ah yes. Then let me summon all my powers, and gird myself, and make short work of this, and turn this weakness into strength." They knew how to use temptation when it came.

There are all manner of temptations that will come to us, the obvious cravings of the flesh, the inner faults of temper and disposition, and the more subtle failings where

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we pass for good, and yet betray the Son of Man. Shall we say, "No, no, we are not that kind," and lift our eyebrows with a sigh? That is not the way. When you do that, you are no stronger for the experience. Indeed you may be the first to yield when the danger comes your way. The Pharisee was not as other men were. There were certain things he would not do. But there were other things much worse that he would do and did.

Let us rather say, "Is it I?" and know the whole range of instinct, and how these cravings are deep in our nature, and how our impulses strike out for their objects, these drives of primitive man, to hunger, to fight, to possess, to love, to hate, to assert, to display. They are within you, if you are a man, demanding expression. They furnish the energy for all of man's darkest crimes and all of his noblest deeds. And to know that you might do the worst thing is to know that you can do the best thing, can win all this volcanic energy to the side of your highest aims, and gain the full coöperation of your inner powers. Thank God I know I might do this dreadful thing, for to be forewarned is to be forearmed, is to go into action with the sword of the spirit and the shield of faith, and take and use the passion ere it takes me unawares.

"Is it I?" They were trained in the finer distinctions of good and evil. They were honest with their own faults. They knew how to use temptation in the highest way. Men and women, if ever we have boasted of our goodness, let us go to our rooms, and shut the door, and kneel at His feet, and say, "Dear Master, Is it I?"

X

THE GARDEN OF LIFE

(AN EASTER SERMON)

"Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid."

JOHN 19:41

"And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock."

MATTHEW 28:59-60

THE story of the resurrection takes us to a garden just outside the walls of Jerusalem. It belonged to a certain Joseph, who lived in Arimathea, a village not far from Jerusalem. Joseph was evidently a man of considerable influence, for he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the highest governing assembly of the Jews. A garden was especially precious to the Oriental who was familiar with the barren wastes of the desert, and who therefore appreciated fertility and beauty all the more. In the religions of the East, paradise has always been a place of flowers.

This morning in our imagination we shall enter the garden gate and pause for a little while inside its ivy-covered walls. What was its meaning for Joseph of Arimathea? First of all, a garden is always a place of hope

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where spirits are renewed. Mark describes this man as one who was looking for the Kingdom of God. If life had been good to him he was not too absorbed in his earthly pleasures to look for the higher things that come from God. If life had denied him the fulfillment of many plans, he was not too broken to hope for a brighter day. And never was Joseph more optimistic than when he was walking among his flowers. When the world seemed tainted, when life seemed mean and miserable, when burdens were heavy and nature and the heart of man seemed cruel, there was always refreshment in the garden. There he was sheltered from the wretchedness of life. Dreams perished; loved ones were taken away; men faltered and fell; but still there was the garden of hope.

Like all Jewish parents, he was devoted to his family, hoping for the future of his children, that they might be sound in mind and strong in body, that one day they might be honorable men and women. Like all Jewish citizens, he hoped for his nation, that one day the promised Deliverer would come, who would end the long story of Israel's oppression and bondage. And like all men who taste the wine of life and find it good, Joseph hoped for more life. In spite of all its uncertainty and pain, this is a happy experience, this feeling of a beating heart, of a mind alive with many thoughts. Joseph, like other men, did not want to die. The body, of course, will wear out at last, but the part of a man that says, "I am," the self that knows and loves, this is too precious to lose. In his Gifford Lectures, Professor Pringle-Pattison says, "There is undeniably something very impressive in the unanimity with which man, from the first dim beginnings of his

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planetary history, has refused to see in death the end of his being and activities. . . . The grassy barrows scattered over our moors and uplands bear eloquent testimony to the undoubting faith of those who laid their dead there. In a still remoter past the cave-men, more than twenty thousand years ago, laid their dead reverently to rest with the same belief in a further life."

Thus Joseph of Arimathea, believing with other devout Jews in the resurrection, had built in his sheltered garden a tomb for himself. With his own hands he had hewn it out of the rock and planted the vines that grew around it. It was a serious thing, yet not morbid. Indeed, he had made it quite beautiful, the thoughtful provision that a man who sees life whole had made for his end. No one would disturb it, and there one day the body of Joseph would rest, waiting for the resurrection.

We all know the Garden of Hope, for hope is one of the things that men live by. Locked up in every parent's heart is the hope that he has for his little ones, that their ways may be honorable and useful, blessed with a full portion of happiness. And like Joseph we hope for more life. The golden streets and pearly gates have no great fascination for us, but when a man faces death he longs for the touch of little fingers and the face of a loved one. There are precious things here on earth that we would like to keep forever. And all who have loved and lost cherish the fond hope that somewhere and somehow in this vast universe we may see again those angel faces smile, which we have loved long since, and lost awhile. We need not be ashamed of that hope, for it is very old in the human heart. Indeed, we are told that stone was

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used for sepulchres before it was used for houses.¹ And because we have all been there, we can understand the place of flowers, the Garden of Hope.

But one day, which men call Good Friday, something happened which changed the Garden of Hope into a Garden of Suffering. Not far beyond the wall there was the sound of digging. Nails were being driven home, men cursing, women sobbing, some tragedy was being enacted by a mob gone mad. Presently a cross was lifted high and its shadow fell across the flowers. Joseph sat in the garden with bowed head and listened. And now he heard the voice of One who suffered, full of pain and yet gentle, a familiar voice that Joseph knew. For he was a friend and admirer of Jesus. He had approved his work, but secretly, for fear of the Jews. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, the assembly that voted to put Jesus to death, but he had stayed away that morning when the vote was cast. It was too late to tell the Sanhedrin what he really thought. The Cross was raised, his Master dying, and a shadow hung over the flowers.

What was that voice saying? "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." That was his voice. No one else could pray that prayer. "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise." He was consoling a thief who was dying near by. "I thirst." And now the fever was mounting in his brain. His lips were hot and swollen. He had offered the living water, which if a man drink he would never thirst, but now he was thirsting. "Into thy hands I commend my spirit." What confidence, unshaken to the end!

¹ Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life*.

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How pathetic and frail were the flowers now. How swiftly a bright sky becomes heavy and overcast, what heights and what depths in this life of ours, what laughter and what tears. Oh, Joseph, who thought to hide yourself from the agony of man, who stopped your ears to the cries of those who suffer, Joseph with your private flowery tomb all ready for you, behold across your garden the shadow of a cross on which your King is crucified!

His pain was not only the pain of one who was losing a close friend, but the pain of one who had lost a great chance, and who knew that some one else was suffering in part because of his neglect. His sorrow was like the sorrow of one who admired his father, but silently let him struggle and pinch and save for his son, and finally die, without that son ever showing his father any appreciation of what he had done. It was like the sorrow of a husband who loved his wife but never bothered to tell her so, and let her slave on in drudgery, keeping his house and bearing his children, until finally her health is broken and she can do no more, and he knows how heartless he has been.

Joseph's sorrow ought to be the sorrow of many who call themselves Christians today, for there are many like Joseph, cultivated, refined admirers of Jesus from a distance, but still living within their sheltered worlds. Because we stay away from the Sanhedrin when the vote is cast, because we are admirers but not crusaders, because once a year we tip our silk hat to Christianity but never bend our backs to crack the rock or saw the wood out of which Christ's Kingdom is built, because we pray much in Christ's name but do little for Christ's sake, the

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Cross goes up and the Son of God still suffers for our neglect.

It is well enough to have hopeful Christians, but the Kingdom will never come merely because gentlefolk sit in their gardens and hope for it. Joseph who had prayed so piously and so harmlessly for the Kingdom, now began to see what the coming of the Kingdom would cost. Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit. On yonder hill was the good grain divinely cast into the soil of humanity; yonder the love of God in all its strangeness and tragic splendor in the man who lays down his life for his friends. And an old man sits apart from it all, a man who might have been a follower, but was not; who might have said a word of protest, but did not; who might have helped carry that burden uphill, but Simon of Cyrene did that; who might have offered a sponge with a cooling drink, but a soldier had that ready; who might have lived far out in the midstream of this movement of God, and really lived, but stayed among his flowers instead. Safe in the cool shade of his garden, while his Master was dying under a burning sun. His garden was a place of suffering. We all know that. We know the flowers and the shadow. We know what it means to hope, and we know what it means to suffer.

The day wore on, slowly for the handful of disciples who lingered and watched, slowly for Joseph who sat with his face buried in his hands. At last the shadow, like a long finger, touched the tomb, so carefully made by Joseph for himself. Where was the tomb for Jesus? He

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said, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit." But what of the body, the sacred clay in which that gentle spirit tarried here on earth? Men who were executed were thrown into an unmarked grave at sundown. Again there was the sound of digging. Two thieves and the Saviour of the world, and the sun was setting fast. Was it even in death as in life? Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head. The shadow seemed to speak as it rested on the tomb, "Why not bring Jesus here?"

Joseph saw and understood, and I think prayed then, but only for a moment, and then was on his feet, running as fast as an old man could, for it was late, but not too late to be a man. He was on his way to Pilate, no longer secretly, but openly, with wide eager eyes, and his heart was on fire. We read that he went in *boldly* and begged for the body of Jesus: "You've got to let me take him now. It's the one thing left for me to do. You're surprised to see me, but never mind. I was one of those who loved him. He was my friend. Now let me care for him." And Pilate gave him leave. And with the help of Nicodemus, he brought him through the garden gate and laid him in the tomb. Now it had become the Garden of Dedication.

Something had happened to Joseph. He was no longer a secret disciple afraid of the Jews. He was no longer a timid sheltered soul hiding from the burdens and cares of the world. He was himself anointing the wounds of the Son of Man. The hour had struck for Joseph, and out of the depths of the universe the eternal question

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sounded, "What kind of a man are you?" "Simon of Cyrene carried his cross, and a soldier offered a cooling drink, and I, Joseph, have brought him to the tomb in the cool of my garden. I have done what I could. I have tried to be a man." But what about you, Joseph? Where will you find a tomb for yourself? "Never mind about that now."

The shadow of the Cross had changed his garden and his heart. And the love that all through the years had been turned in on self, at last, like the love of his Master, was reaching out. There is the heart of it, of Good Friday and Easter, of the Christian religion, of life here and hereafter—life measured not by the wine drunk, but by the wine poured out.

I said, Let me walk in the fields.

He said, No; walk in the town.

I said, There are no flowers there.

He said, No flowers, but a crown.

I said, But the air is thick,

And fogs are veiling the sun.

He answered, Yet souls are sick,

And souls in the dark undone.

I cast one look at the fields,

Then set my face to the town.

He said, My child, do you yield?

Will you leave the flowers for the crown?

Then into his hand went mine,

And into my heart came he;

And I walk in a light divine

The path I had feared to see.

One day the Garden of Hope, and on Good Friday

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the Garden of Suffering, and that evening the Garden of Dedication. And on the third day, as it began to dawn, the living Christ was walking there in the Garden of Life. It was Easter Day for Joseph of Arimathea.

It wasn't Easter for Jerusalem. It is important to remember that the risen Lord appeared only to his followers. There never has been and there never will be Easter for people who shut themselves in for the purpose of enjoying pleasant things, stopping their ears to the cries of men. They may sanctify their viewpoint with orthodox religion, but there is no real Easter for them. There never has been and there never will be Easter for timid people, concerned overmuch with getting their souls saved, but forgetting to give a cup of cold water for Jesus' sake. Wilberforce, the great emancipator, was once asked by an elderly lady if he was quite sure his soul was saved. He answered, "My dear lady, I've been so busy I've forgotten I even had a soul." Busy freeing the slave and helping the poor, so earnestly and so generously, that he was called the authorized interpreter of the national conscience; so busy seeing to it that England had a soul, that he had quite forgotten about himself. The grain of self-interest had fallen into the ground, where it died, but it was bearing much fruit unto life eternal.

Do you see what Easter means? Across your fairest garden one day a shadow falls. You hear the hoarse cries of brutal men, and women sobbing. You look, and see from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down. And you can shut your eyes, and stop your ears, and sit among your flowers, and love yourself, and die.

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But is that what you really want to do?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

You can kneel and give your all, and rise up and be a man, and open your garden gate, and bring him in. And if you do, on Easter day you will see him walking in the sunlight in the Garden of Life. For the stone has been rolled away.